

TALE OF TWO OBAMAS • SPIDER-MAN VS. MOSES

OCTOBER 2007

IN THESE TIMES

Bernie Sanders:
Earth to **Bush**

Report from Iraq:
Civil war **surges**



BY ARTHUR LEVINE

BUSTING THE UNI NBUSTERS

PLUS:

China Miéville sinks the libertarian ship

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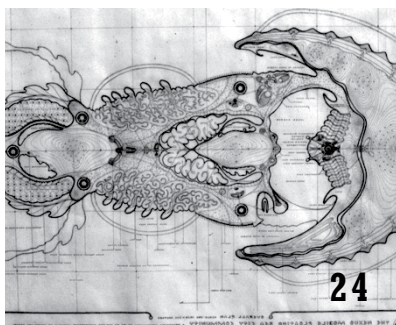
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editorial

Earth to Bush

GROUND CONTROL TO Mr. Bush: What planet are you living on? Today, tens of millions of Americans are experiencing a declining standard of living and yet you continue to insist that our economy is “strong” and “robust.” Rather than acknowledge the economic anxieties of American workers, you insist that they don’t know how good they have it.

Since you have been president, 5 million more Americans have slipped into poverty; hunger and homelessness have increased. Because you refused to raise the minimum wage for six years, millions of workers are continuing to work full time and live in desperation. Low-wage workers are often unable to find quality childcare and their kids enter school at a special disadvantage—many of them never to catch up. It is no coincidence, Mr. President, that we have both the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world as well as the highest rate of incarceration.

But it’s not only the poor who are suffering under your “thriving” economy. The next generation will be the first to have a lower standard of living than their parents. From 2001 to 2005, all of the income growth in our country has accrued to the top 5 percent, while the bottom 90 percent of households experienced a 4.2 percent decline in their market-based incomes. Have your advisers told you, Mr. President, that 3 million Americans have lost their pensions during your presidency, aging people terrified about how they will cope in their “golden years?”

Have your aides told you that home foreclosures are now the highest on record; and that the predatory lending practices that your administration encouraged have led to an extraordinary level of instability and volatility on the stock market? Do you know that the personal savings rate is lower than at any time since before the Great Depression and that wages and salaries

are at the lowest share of gross domestic product since 1929? Have you been informed that a two-income family today has less disposable income than a one-income family had 30 years ago, and that the stressed-out American people are now forced to work the longest hours of any people in the industrialized world? Millions of workers in our country don’t have any vacation time at all. Does this really sound like a strong economy?

The sorry state of American health care is just another social injustice of the Bush era. Since you have been in office, nearly seven million Americans have lost their health insurance. Your home state of Texas has the highest rate of uninsured children in the country, and yet you are threatening to veto the State Children’s Health Insurance Program legislation that would provide health care for 3 million kids.

I suspect, Mr. President, when you look at the economy, you are solely interested in what’s happening with your wealthy friends. Since 2001, the richest 1 percent of Americans haven’t had it so good since the 1920s. According to the latest data, from 2001 to 2005, the top 1 percent of households gained \$283 billion of total income—\$183,902 per household. Yes, the economy is doing very well for them. On the other hand, the bottom 90 percent lost \$272 billion or \$2,071 per household.

Mr. President, in the coming months some of us in Congress will be fighting for economic and healthcare policies which are desperately needed by American working people. Based on your ideology and your long track record of top-down class warfare, I strongly suspect that you will oppose those initiatives. But whatever else you do or don’t do, please show some understanding of the economic realities facing the lives of ordinary Americans. Stop telling them how good the economy is—it insults their intelligence.

—Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.)

IN THESE TIMES

“With liberty and justice for all...”

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mixed reaction

JUST THE FACTS



46 Number of natural disasters declared so far this year in the United States.

28 Number of natural disasters declared in 1986.

960,952 Number of people killed by natural disasters worldwide between 1991-2005.

95 Percentage of deaths caused by natural disasters that occur in developing countries

“

... people will sometimes say, 'Why don't you write more politics?' And I have to explain to them that writing the lives of women is politics.

”

—GRACE PALEY

LABANARAMA BY TERRY LABAN



QUID PRO QUO

THE QUID:

Who on earth could oppose the sweet sustenance of mother's milk? Well, it turns out that the infant formula industry's against it. According to the August 31 *Washington Post*, they were not pleased to learn of the planned ad campaign by the Health and Human Services Department to promote breast feeding, which, despite alleviating respiratory problems and obesity, is now practiced at a

historically low rate. Thankfully, the industry had hired a former chairman of the Republican National Committee and a former top regulatory official as lobbyists.

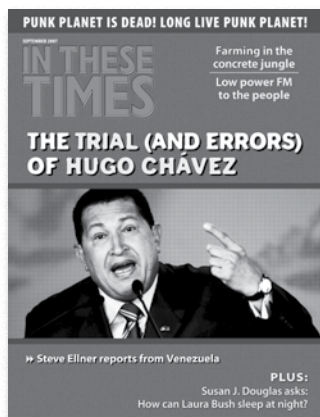
THE QUO:

The lobbyists couldn't quash the ads, but did change them. The original ads were to feature stark images of insulin syringes and rubber nipples on asthma inhalers. What ended up airing, was decidedly less threatening:



"friendly images of dandelions and cherry-topped ice cream scoops." Because nothing conjures up images of babies suffering like ice cream.

letters



How does she sleep?

I have long thought Susan J. Douglas alone is worth the modest price of an issue of *In These Times*. Her last column, “How Does Laura Bush Sleep at Night?” (September 2007), reinforced that conclusion. I had also been wondering why the First Lady was so high up on the “most admired women” lists. As much as anyone else in this administration, she has almost 4,000 young American lives to account for. Laura Bush may have helped get her husband off alcohol, but, in A.A. parlance, she’s still an enabler. If she is sleeping at night, I hope she’s having nightmares.

James M. Martin
Via e-mail

Wrong turn

David Moberg’s uncritical article about Citizen Action’s efforts to pass legislation to mandate healthcare system in Wisconsin was unfortunate (“Universal Health Care for Wisconsin?” September 2007). The article described their efforts to institute a new system of taxation to fund private health insurance companies and create a parallel public insurance. Citizen

Action has been arguing for something similar here in New York. Their defeatist approach fails to cure the root causes of the diseases besetting our healthcare system.

The root problem is corporate health insurance and healthcare. Only universal publicly owned health insurance (single-payer) as practiced in most industrialized countries—or socialized healthcare, as practiced in the United Kingdom—are proven to control costs and deliver

that its program is achievable. Anyone who has ever bargained for anything knows that you don’t start by giving way the store and then try to bargain up. During the last political opening on healthcare in the ’90s when the Democrats controlled the government, Citizen Action and others defected from the single-payer coalition. This resulted in the easily discredited proposal from Hillary’s secret commission, which set back our movement by decades.

Citizen Action fails to confront the root causes of the disease besetting our healthcare system: corporate health insurance and healthcare.

better health outcomes.

Citizen Action has argued that a mixed system of private and public insurers is better than nothing, and achievable, and that the public the public system would eventually out-compete the corporate providers. But several industrialized nations have experimented with privatizing parts of their systems in the hope of controlling costs and increasing innovation. They found that it is in the interest of private companies to look for short-term gains and this led to them cherry-picking the healthiest individuals and leaving the expensive care to the public system to pay. They also found that the duplicate extensive bureaucracies needed by each private insurer and by healthcare providers, who then had to deal with multiple insurers, drove up costs.

Citizens Action argues

Currently, the House of Representatives has a bill for national health insurance (HR 676) with a growing list of sponsors. It bans corporate profiteering on our health and even makes provisions for the workers whose jobs will become obsolete once we win.

Michael Kaufman,
Coalition for Democracy
of Central New York
Healthcare Work Group,
Bovina Center, N.Y.

Cultivating change

Phoebe Connelly and Chelsea Ross’ “Farming the Concrete Jungle” (September 2007) was a well-written assessment of the nature of community gardening, urban agriculture, and why efforts of organizations like Growing Power and The Food Project are needed to deal with urban poverty.

Connelly and Ross not only highlighted some of the most innovative efforts, they also pointed out some contradictions in more “conventional” alternative agriculture efforts, including the elite nature of most farmers’ markets. Keep up the good work.

Sasha Cuerda
Via e-mail

Nader’s president

It was startling to see Laird Hastay’s letter denying that Ralph Nader was the cause of George Bush’s victory in 2000 (“Letters,” September 2007).

Al Gore lost the Florida vote by 537 votes. Nader received 97,421 votes. Nader campaigned specifically and vigorously against Al Gore—almost ignoring Bush. His intent was clear. Post-election surveys clearly indicated that most of those 97,421 people would have voted Gore if Nader had not been running.

Nader’s campaign will always be a historical act for the damage he caused. Prior to 2000, I used to send money to Nader and his causes—with admiration. Now, whenever I see his name or his organization, I am reminded of George W. Bush.

Edward Mulvaney
Pasadena, Calif.

CORRECTIONS

In “Farming the Concrete Jungle” (September 2007), we should have reported that Laura Lawson is a professor at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, not the University of Illinois at Chicago. Also, the Massachusetts Avenue Project is located in Buffalo, N.Y., not Albany. We regret the errors.

contributors

Dear Reader,

On behalf of the *In These Times* community, I'd like to extend a heartfelt thanks to all of you who responded to fundraising pleas this past summer. Thanks to you, *In These Times* is on its way to being able to afford the exorbitant postal rate hike that went into effect in July. And please, those of you who have sent in a contribution, bear with us as we make the transition to a new, and ultimately more efficient donor database. A thank you letter and tax statement will be forthcoming. (If you have any questions, please contact Anna Grace Schneider at anna@inthese-times.com or 773.772.0100 ext. 242.)

This has been a summer of ups and downs. In early August, Assistant Publisher Jarrett Dapier joined the staff here at 2040 N. Milwaukee. Jarrett comes to us from ACLU of Illinois where he was a legal assistant. When not in the office, he is with his daughter Franny. On a more somber note, the *In These Times* community lost a good friend with the passing of author Grace Paley, a long-time reader and contributor who stuck with us through thick and thin.

Yours truly,



Joel Bleifuss
Editor & Publisher

YOUR IDEALS CAN LIVE ON.

REMEMBER IN THESE TIMES IN YOUR WILL.

For more information call Anna Grace Schneider at 773-772-0100 x 242 or e-mail her at: anna@inthesetimes.com.



CARRIE KILMAN is a writer, editor and rabble-rouser who lives in Madison, Wisc. Most recently, she was a staff writer at *Teaching Tolerance*, a magazine of the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Ala., and a co-founder of Alabama Feminist Action.



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CHINA MIÉVILLE is a British novelist whose books include *King Rat*, *Perdido Street Station*, *The Scar*, *Iron Council*, *Looking For Jake* and, most recently, the children's novel *Un Lun Dun*. He is also the author of *Between Equal Rights: A Marxist Theory of International Law*. He lives and works in London.

ACHY OBEJAS is a Havana-born journalist who writes for the *Chicago Tribune*. She is the author of the acclaimed novel, *Days of Awe*, and the editor of *Havana Noir*, a book of crime stories that will be released in October. *This is What Happened in Our Other Life*, a collection of her poetry, will be released in November.



The work of these writers is supported by the Puffin Foundation First Amendment Fund.

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Iraqis march outside Najaf on August 31 to condemn the bombing of a shrine in Karbala. At least 52 people died and 300 were wounded.

GASSEM ZEIN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Why Iraq Is Getting Worse

A new civil war between Shiites erupts within the old civil war between Sunnis and Shiites

BY DAVID ENDERS

NAJAF, IRAQ – A cloud of steam rises above the crowd in the 120-degree heat. As their leader approaches the podium, the thousands who have assembled meet him with pledges of their fealty.

“We are all Badr Brigade!” they shout, a reference to the paramilitary organization of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC), which held this rally on July 19, in honor of Ayatollah Bakr al-Hakim, the party’s founding leader, who was assassinated here four years ago. His nephew, Amar al-Hakim, now holds the position.

I was one of the millions who attended al-Hakim’s funeral four years ago, some of whom walked the 100 miles from Baghdad to Najaf to show their sorrow. It was largely a peaceful affair.

But now, as Iraq devolves further into civil war inside civil war inside occupation, the commemoration of al-Hakim’s death, which prompted mourning from

Shiites across the country, has taken on a largely political feel. The Badr Brigade is at war with Sunni guerillas and other Shiite militias, and largely considered by its opponents to be the tool of corrupt, exiled elites who have allied themselves with the occupation in order to carve up Iraq.

The country’s disintegration is obvious in Najaf, one of the seven of the nine southern provinces in which SIIC controls the municipal government. Here, things are run as a police state: I accepted an invitation by SIIC to travel to Najaf from Baghdad because it was the only way to safely negotiate the dangerous road between the two cities.

Despite the assurances of SIIC officials that Najaf was safe, we were given strict orders not to leave our hotel—at which Iraqi military and police loyal to the party had been posted—unless we were with them. When I left the tour for a pre-arranged meeting with the spokesman from

Tayyera Sadrieen, another Shiite political party led by Moqtada al-Sadr, it nearly provoked an armed confrontation.

During the interview, Tayyera Sadrieen’s spokesman, Saleh al-Obaidi, laid out why supporters of his party and its paramilitary, the Jeish al-Mehdi (JAM), had clashed with Badr loyalists across the country and, increasingly, in southern Iraq’s poorest provinces of Misan and Muthanna, which are inaccessible to western journalists. In August, two of SIIC’s governors there were assassinated by the JAM.

“The Sadrieen in general focus on the people. The southern governorates are suffering more than Baghdad maybe, concerning the services and the economic situation,” al-Obaidi says. “There were no tensions for 15 or 16 months [after the invasion], but, at the same time, there were no services and no help from the governors of these provinces, so the people started to demonstrate and look and ask for something better. Unfortunately, the reaction from many governors was severe—they used guns and campaigns of detention against the people.”

Fighting escalated at the end of August in Karbala, when JAM fighters attempted to take over a Badr-controlled Shiite shrine during a religious festival. After clashes that left more than 50 dead, Sadr ordered his militia to “suspend” operations for six months, though it is unclear to what extent Sadr controls the men fighting under his name, and the announcement mirrored one Sadr made two years ago.

In Basra, the only place in Iraq that is actually exporting oil and therefore producing revenue, a three-way battle is taking place between SIIC, the JAM and Fadhila, a Sadrist offshoot with support in the city. The British military withdrew its troops at the end of August, leaving only about 5,000 troops stationed at the airport. Corruption and a deadly power struggle have left Basra in a state of decline. Fadhila and SIIC, the two most powerful parties in Basra’s provincial council, continue to fight over the governor’s seat, which has brought governance to a halt, while the JAM and gangs that increasingly fought British troops have taken over the streets.

At the center of the struggle is the approximately \$170 million yearly recon-

struction budget allocated to the province, as well as control of the port and its oil exports. Fadhila's governor, Mohamed Al-Waili, claims sole oversight over such projects, and his detractors charge he's embezzled most of the money. Al-Waili claimed "80 to 90 percent" of the planned reconstruction projects in the last year had been completed, but declined to show journalists any of them.

Meanwhile, in Baghdad, the surge has not worked the way the United States anticipated, or perhaps intended. (The stated purpose was to create space for political reconciliation, but among other intentions, according to the *Guardian*, was sending a message to the Iranian government.) The greatest effect has been to keep Shiite militias from openly carrying weapons on the streets, slowing some of the efforts to cleanse neighborhoods of Sunnis.

"If it weren't for the surge, there would be no Sunnis left in Baghdad," says one Iraqi journalist who works for an American paper. Nonetheless, the surge has not stopped militia activity in many neighborhoods, and the JAM continues to expand.

All over Baghdad and the surrounding areas, Sunni guerillas and tribal militias,

some of whom participated in sectarian cleansing over the past three years that forced millions of Iraqis, mostly Shiites, from their homes, have now decided to work with the U.S. military, largely in fear of the Iraqi army—which is full of Badr and JAM loyalists—and the increasingly well-armed Shiite militias.

North of Baghdad, in Falahat, Sunni tribal leaders have decided to work with the United States against al Qaeda. The tribal militiamen admitted they were as afraid of Sunni extremists as they were of the Shiite militias that have grown in number as millions of Shiites have been driven from their homes. The militiamen said they feared the Shiite families that had been removed would return seeking revenge.

In the north, America's Kurdish allies are growing increasingly impatient with the U.S. military and government. The Sunni guerillas and tribes now working with the United States have driven Kurds from their homes, and the majority of the Kurdish population has fled Mosul, Iraq's third largest city.

But the real prize is oil-rich Kirkuk. The Iraqi government has dragged its feet on

a referendum on whether Kirkuk should join the Kurdish regional government. The referendum, originally mandated by the end of this year, appears unlikely to occur, and the Kurds have grown impatient with the U.S. military's failure to secure the city.

"We cannot wait," says Noschirwan Mustafa, a founding member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, the party of Jalal Talabani, Iraq's current president. "If they leave Kirkuk to us, we can control it."

"Control" almost certainly means ethnic cleansing. Various scenarios could play out, but most observers fear Turkey would intervene out of fear of an independent Kurdish statelet and on behalf of the small, ethnic Turkish minority that resides around Kirkuk.

The Kurds are likely to take Kirkuk, the moment the U.S. allows it, although Mustafa believes the United States would betray its Kurdish allies, as it did in the mid-'70s, to avoid angering the Turks.

"The Kurds demand to have control of their own territory," Mustafa says. ■

DAVID ENDERS, author of *Baghdad Bulletin*, reported from Iraq this summer with support from a grant by the Pulitzer Center.

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Photo © Laura M. Osteen

STOP JIM CROW JUSTICE

Last December, Mychal Bell, now 17, was convicted of attempted second-degree murder by an all-white jury in the small town of Jena, La. He was among six black teenagers charged in a case that www.ColorOfChange.org is calling "Jim Crow justice."

The events leading up to the trial started last September when a black student tried to sit under a tree in the schoolyard that was traditionally reserved for white students. The next day, three nooses were found hanging from the tree. After a series of brawls for which white youth faced no consequences, a white student got beaten up and six black teenagers were arrested. Bell faces up to 15 years in prison for his conviction.

"I think the district attorney is pinning it on us to make an example of us," said Bryant Purvis, 16, one of the students charged in the case. "In Jena, people get accused of things they didn't do a lot."

District Attorney Reed Walters warned Purvis and others against protesting at a school assembly, telling them, "I can make your lives disappear with a stroke of my pen."

"The District Attorney has refused to protect the rights of Jena's Black population and has turned the police and courts into instruments of intimidation and oppression," says ColorOfChange.org. As *In These Times* went to press, the site had collected more than 140,000 signatures in support of the "Jena 6" and their families.

To sign a petition or make a donation, visit ColorOfChange.org

—Lewis Wallace



MICHAEL DAVID MURPHY—WWW.WHILESEATED.ORG

The Crime Against Debbie Almontaser

IT'S HARD TO believe the article in the Aug. 6 *New York Post* that started it all could be taken seriously:

Activists with ties to the principal of the city's Arabic-themed school are hawking T-shirts that glorify Palestinian terror, the *Post* has learned. The inflammatory tees boldly declare "Intifada NYC"—apparently a call for a Gaza-style uprising in the Big Apple.

The "principal" was educator Debbie Almontaser, who is Muslim. The "school" was the Khalil Gibran International Academy, a middle school that was designated as New York's first Arabic public school. And Almontaser, it turned out, had no ties to the T-shirt "activists," Arab Women Active In The Arts And Media (AWAAM). She merely sits on the board of the Saba Association of American Yemenis, which provides AWAAM free office space.

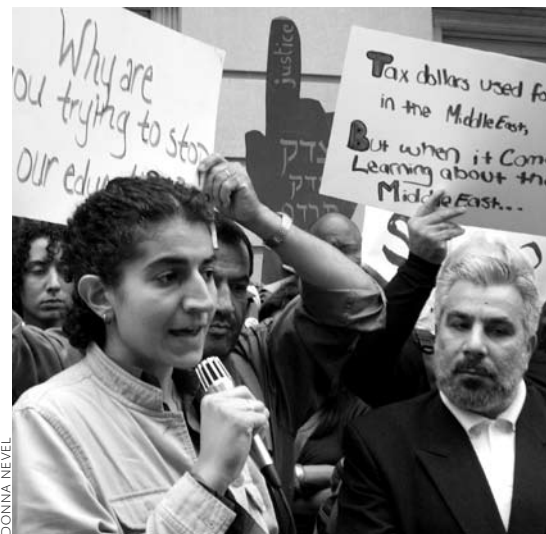
"The word *intifada*," Almontaser explained to the *Post*, "basically means 'shaking off.' That is the root word if you look it up in Arabic. I understand it is developing a negative connotation due to the uprising in the Israeli-Palestinian areas. I don't believe the intention is to have any of that kind of violence in New York City. I think it's pretty much an opportunity for girls to express that they are part of New York City society ... and shaking off oppression."

Four days later, after a public scolding from United Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten ("The word 'intifada,'" Weingarten told the *New York Times*, was "something that ought to be denounced, not explained away"), the *Post* was able to report, "'Intifada' Principal Resigns."

New York City Public Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein announced that Almontaser's resignation was in her school's best interest. Mayor Michael Bloomberg also welcomed it.

On Aug. 20, at a Debbie Almontaser rally held outside the old Tweed Courthouse near City Hall, demonstrators tried to understand how a right-wing newspaper in a city like New York could force the resignation of a respected community figure by tarring her with the "terrorist" brush.

Deborah Howard, who worked with



DONNA NEVEL

Mona Eldahry, founding director of AWAAM, at a community event in support of Debbie Almontaser and the KGIA

Almontaser to get the Khalil Gibran academy off the ground, asked, "Once the tabloids came out with their smear campaign"—the neo-conservative *New York Sun* also played its part—"where was the counter-media? If this is a Department of Education school, why aren't they standing behind Debbie?"

AWAAM's Erica Waples ran around the crowd of progressive Jews, Muslim activists and at least one black Baptist minister from Brooklyn, soothing the anxious buzz of the attending media. "The biggest issue," she says, "is fear. We live in a post-9/11 culture of fear. AWAAM is afraid of showing the videos our girls made, because then they can be identified, and we don't want them to be targeted."

The *Post*'s reporting was the yellow press version of the fearmongering that drives the Stop The Madrassa Coalition (or, as it announces itself on its website: "Stop The Madrassa: Protecting Our Schools From Islamist Curricula"). The Coalition, a right-wing citizen's group that includes the crack-pot blogger Daniel Pipes, wants Khalil Gibran closed down. Almontaser's resignation, sufficient for Klein and Bloomberg, was not enough for Stop The Madrassa.

On his weekly radio show, following the principal's resignation, Bloomberg made a nervous reference to Almontaser, that suggested how much this fiasco resembled a witch hunt.

"She's very smart," he admitted. "She is certainly not a terrorist."

—Robert Hirschfield

Ehud Barak's Second Coming

NEARLY 10 YEARS to the day since Ehud Barak was first elected chair of Israel's Labor party, he emerged victorious again on June 12—in a narrow primary win over his more dovish opponent, Ami Ayalon. In May 1999, Barak trounced the incumbent Likud prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, with 57 percent in a direct vote.

As prime minister for 20 months, Barak negotiated within a few meters of a peace agreement with Syria, withdrew Israeli forces unilaterally from Lebanon, attempted an agreement with the Palestinians at Camp David in the summer of 2000, presided over the beginnings of the intifada that followed, made one last-ditch negotiating attempt at Taba, and then succumbed in a nearly two to one electoral debacle to Ariel Sharon. Barak resigned from politics, loudly proclaiming that Yasir Arafat had proven himself incapable of making peace.

Barak had not made a successful transition from armed forces chief of staff, a general who commands, to being a political leader who negotiates policies. An example was his falling out with the Meretz party, his more left-wing but also closest ideological ally; by the summer of 2000, he required the mediation of a Meretz Member of Knesset (Avshalom Vilan), who had served under his direct command in the army, to even speak with Meretz leader Yossi Sarid.

The need for an Israeli prime minister to be skilled at coalition-building has only deepened with the degeneration of Israel's system of proportional representation into a free-for-all of multiple parties. (The current Knesset has 12.) No Israeli ruling party has ever won a majority of the 120 seats in the Knesset, but the major parties have declined to a historically low ebb. Labor and Meretz (Labor's traditional partner) have fallen from 44 and 12 members, respectively, in 1992, to 19 and five seats today—the political price for the failure of the peace process in the '90s. Likud, once again led by Netanyahu, has gone from around 40 under Ariel Sharon to its current 12—due largely to Sharon's creation of the centrist Kadima party, the current governing party under Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, which has 29 seats.

Kadima, however, is reeling from last

year's dismal war with Hezbollah; polls consistently show Olmert is leading the party toward oblivion—with a level of support ranging below 10 percent. But elections are not due until 2010 and sitting members of Knesset who know they are vulnerable have little incentive to vote for an early election.

A possible silver lining of Olmert's weakness is that it might encourage him to seriously negotiate a two-state framework agreement with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at the upcoming international conference slated for November. Such a Hail-Mary pass—if it succeeds—could boost Olmert electorally.

Kadima has one additional option to remain in power and to simultaneously advance the prospects for peace: the ascendancy of Foreign Minister Tsipi Livni to replace Olmert as the party's standard-bearer. Of the three leading contenders for prime minister, ex-Likudnik Livni seems the most inclined to work hard for a negotiated peace and she actually leads both Barak and Netanyahu in the polls.

Barak is apparently basing his comeback strategy on a hardline stance. The popular newspaper *Yediot Achranot* reported that he has discounted the possibility of any West Bank withdrawal in the near term. He has proclaimed the need for three to five years for Israel to develop a technological defense that would deter rocket and missile attacks from the West Bank like those Israel has experienced from the other territories it evacuated—Gaza and southern Lebanon. Having replaced his failed predecessor, Amir Peretz, as both head of the second largest party in Olmert's coalition and as defense minister, Barak may undermine Olmert's attempts to bolster Abbas by the dismantling of West Bank checkpoints or the further release of prisoners. This could rattle Labor's base, causing defections to Meretz or Kadima.

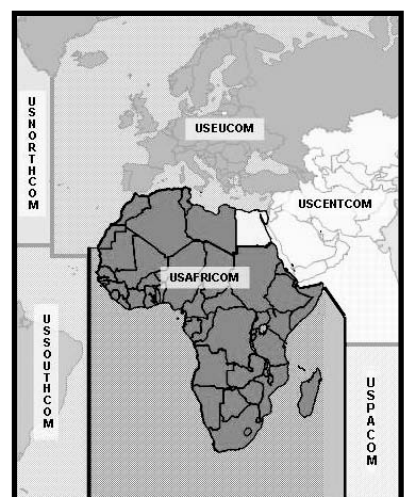
Barak was a tragic figure in his first term, who could have delivered much yet failed miserably. The resurrected version has been hardened by that experience. If the choices in the next election are to be among Barak, Netanyahu, who is more right wing than he was a decade ago, and whoever Kadima ultimately runs, it is sobering to think that Israel's best hope for a peaceful future may lie with the ex-rightists who have governed so disastrously during their first year in power.

—Ralph Seliger

AFRICOM: Round One in a New Cold War?

THE FORGOTTEN CONTINENT of Africa could become the new battleground in the next American conflict.

On Feb. 6, President Bush formally established the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), a unified command structure located on the continent. By 2012, the United States wants two dozen bases in Africa to promote U.S. security interests and “the common goals of development of health, education, democracy, and economic growth.”



This map shows how AFRICOM will be created by reassigning parts of the existing European and Central Commands.

Bush announced the creation of AFRICOM a week after Chinese President Hu Jintao landed in Cameroon to start a high-profile, eight-country African tour, during which he signed more than 50 cooperation agreements and pledged to double China's assistance to Africa by 2009.

Despite a surge in interest during the Cold War, Africa has never played a strategic role in U.S. foreign policy. In 1995, the Department of Defense stated: “Ultimately we see very little traditional strategic interest in Africa.” But with increasing investment from an energy-hungry China, the United States is reconsidering.

“It's an ideological game,” says Vijay Prashad, director of international studies at Trinity College. “Since China began to enter Africa with a new development agenda,

it called the United States' bluff. Now Africa is becoming the battlefield of ideas over two forms of hegemony."

According to the State Department, Chinese trade with Africa quadrupled to \$55 billion from 2002 to 2006. China estimates there are 800 Chinese firms investing in Africa.

Neoconservative groups call China's growing relationship with Africa "alarming" and want a response. "The United States must be alert to the potential long-term disruption of American access to important raw materials and energy sources as these resources are 'locked up' by Chinese firms," reads a 2006 Heritage Foundation policy background.

While many NGOs have joined U.S. lawmakers in supporting AFRICOM in principle, there is skepticism.

In recent testimony on Capitol Hill, Mark Malan, a program officer with Refugees International, summed up the NGO position: "The main concern of operational NGOs is that AFRICOM will increase the trend towards the militarization of humanitarian action, which raises fundamental concerns about the purpose of such assistance."

Some critics see AFRICOM as another

foothold for the military-industrial complex. "AFRICOM ... reflects the Bush administration's primary reliance on the use of force to pursue its strategic interests," writes Salim Lone, a former spokesman for the U.N. mission in Iraq and a columnist with the *Daily Nation* in Nairobi.

U.S. officials have stated what AFRICOM will not do — "this *isn't* about chasing terrorists around Africa"; "AFRICOM *isn't* going to be used to protect natural resources"; "AFRICOM will in *no way* take a leadership role in the area of diplomacy." Exactly what it *will* do is unclear.

But that hasn't stopped AFRICOM from garnering support at home—even from progressives such as Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wisc.). His House counterpart, Rep. Donald Payne (D-N.J.), is more skeptical. "To the extent that establishing a command where our relationship with Africa is the priority rather than an afterthought can do so, I support it," said Payne, who chairs the Subcommittee on Africa & Global Health. "However, I do have some serious concerns."

Others say the Defense Department must tread carefully. "It's not that the idea itself is bad when you look at some of the

things that have happened there, but we need to be very artful in how we proceed," said a high-ranking Democratic staffer. "This administration has not made it easy for the U.S. to seem credible on security issues. The current environment doesn't really leave room for error."

Regardless, Africa's mounting importance as a global petroleum source cannot be underestimated. Since 2002, U.S. oil imports from Nigeria, Angola, Algeria and Libya have nearly doubled, and according to data from the Energy Information Administration, Africa has surpassed the Middle East as the largest supplier of crude oil to the United States. The National Intelligence Council projects that African oil imports could account for 25 percent of total U.S. imports by 2015. At the same time, China accounted for 40 percent of total growth in global demand for oil in the last four years. Today, more than a quarter of China's oil imports come from Africa.

That demand indicates Africa will begin to play a much larger role in both U.S. and Chinese foreign policy over the coming decades, as the large powers play yet another round of the age-old "great game."

—Christopher Moraff

appall-o-meter

3.4 The Common Touch

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice may be no great shakes at statesmanship, but do not mess with her shopping.

When last we checked on Condi, she was dropping wads at Ferragamo in New York during the darkest hour of the Hurricane Katrina catastrophe. (A fellow shopper remonstrated, and Rice had her thrown out.) Now comes a vignette from a new biography showing Rice's prodigious charm with the service class. Rice was in a store looking at jewelry, according to Glenn Kessler's *The Confidante*, and asked to see the more expensive stuff. The clerk apparently muttered some faintly audible insolence, which drew this withering lecture from the secretary of state:

"Let's get one thing straight. You are behind the counter because you have to work for minimum wage. I'm on this side asking to see the good jewelry because I make considerably more."

8.3 Cripes, What a Race!

As murderers go, white supremacists are about the vilest class of human you'll ever meet, but they do have one mitigat-

ing quality: They are also the stupidest.

Consider two Boston-area avatars of the master race, Eric Jeremy Snow, 25, and James Scott Winquist, 23, who in 2005 bludgeoned two unfortunate bums to death with baseball bats. To commemorate this bloody little lark, reports the *Boston Globe*, Snow and Winquist severed a hand of one of their victims as a trophy. Later, at a party, the men regaled friends with impressions of their victims' final moments. They also showed off the hand.

Snow and Winquist, members of the Brotherhood of Blood, a white power group, were arrested in August after a partygoer led police to the spot in Snow's mother's backyard where the murderers buried the hand. The men have pleaded not guilty, despite the fact that authorities have taped conversations—from a jailhouse telephone, no less—in which they discuss the murders.



8.6 Mr. Kristol, Jack D. Ripper on Line One

George Packer, in a *New Yorker* blog, quotes a heads-up relayed to a respected scholar from a friend in a neoconservative think tank:

They [the source's institution] have "instructions" (yes, that was the word used) from the Office of the Vice President to roll out a campaign for war

with Iran in the week after Labor Day; it will be coordinated with the American Enterprise Institute, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Weekly Standard*, *Commentary*, Fox, and the usual suspects. It will be heavy sustained assault on the airwaves, designed to knock public sentiment into a position from which a war can be maintained. Evidently they don't think they'll ever get majority support for this—they want something like 35-40 percent support, which in their book is "plenty."

—Dave Mulcahey

Funding Indonesia's Abusive Military

snapshot

COUNTERTERRORISM" HAS BECOME Indonesia's latest slogan for avoiding military reform while simultaneously strengthening its apparatus of repression. In return for its loyalty in the war on terror, the Bush administration has side-stepped congressional concerns of military abuses in Indonesia.

Amnesty International observed in its 2007 country report: "The majority of human rights violations by the security forces were not investigated, and impunity for past violations persisted." These included two cases in which the National Human Rights Commission submitted evidence in 2004 that security forces had committed crimes against humanity.

A May report from the Center for Public Integrity's International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) concluded that the Indonesia military (TNI) is one of the largest recipients of post-9/11 military assistance. In fact, from 2002 to 2005, Indonesia was the largest recipient of the Pentagon's Regional Defense Counterterrorism Fellowship Program (CTFP). The ICIJ also noted that under CTFP the TNI was receiving tutelage on "Intelligence in Combating Terrorism" and "Student Military Police Prep."

Ed McWilliams, political counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta from 1996 to 1999, and now an independent human rights advocate, says, "While TNI impunity for abuses and corruption remain a problem throughout the archipelago, it is particularly acute in West Papua. In a real sense, the post-Suharto democratic transition never transpired in West Papua, where the military and police continue to employ terror, torture and extrajudicial killing to enforce Jakarta's rule."

In 1969, West Papua was incorporated into Indonesia through the threat of force. Not much has changed. On July 5, Human Rights Watch reported, "Both army troops and police units ... continue to engage in indiscriminate village 'sweeping' operations in pursuit of suspected militants, using excessive, often brutal, and at times lethal force against civilians."

On August 16, the Indonesian paper *Cenderawasih Pos*, reporting on anticipated demonstrations in West Papua calling for self-determination, quoted Col. Burhanuddin Siagian as saying that the



DONGGUAN, GUANGDONG —A worker stands before a spinning machine at the production line of Dongguan Da Lang Wealthwise Plastic Factory on Sept. 4. Regulations have been introduced to require producers to take back unsafe food and toys. China is hoping to defend the quality of its exports following a spate of product safety scandals. (Photo by Feng Li/Getty Images)

TNI "will not hesitate to shoot on sight" pro-independence activists. In 2003, the U.N.-backed Serious Crimes Unit in East Timor issued two indictments which stated that Siagian made similar speeches threatening to kill independence supporters and was responsible for the deaths of seven Timorese men in April 1999. The group Human Rights First noted that human rights activists from Papua were threatened after meetings in early June with a visiting U.N. human rights official.

"[T]he TNI in West Papua is fueling sectarian strife by recruiting largely Muslim migrants to form paramilitaries loyal to Jakarta's rule," says McWilliams. "It is also creating Papuan militias along the lines of those it created to devastating effect in East Timor. As in the past throughout the archipelago, the TNI aims to generate communal tensions in West Papua as a justification for maintaining its presence and for continuing to exploit the region's vast natural resources."

The East Timor and Indonesia Human Rights Network (ETAN) and its allies in Congress, such as Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.) and Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), have pushed several provisions in the

new Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill (H.R. 2764). The measures require that the administration report that Indonesia has made progress in human rights and military reform before \$2 million in military assistance to Jakarta is released. Though not as tough as legislation passed following a 1991 massacre in East Timor, the new language puts on record a dissent from the Bush administration's policy of blanket support for the TNI. Still, McWilliams argues, more is needed.

"The fate of real military reform and possibly the success of the democratic transition in Indonesia depends very much on the U.S. Congress' willingness to insist on real reform, especially to push for genuine civilian control of the military and an end to TNI impunity," he says. "Democrats must understand that an unreformed TNI, one that supports and has helped create fundamentalist Islamic militias inside Indonesia, cannot be a credible partner in the so-called 'war on terror.' The U.S. Congress should heed the voices of human rights defenders in Indonesia and refuse to bankroll TNI criminality, abuses and impunity."

—Ben Terrall

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

Twilight of the Market's Idols



AS I WRITE this, Republicans, nearly deranged by their own homophobia, have succeeded in ousting Sen. Larry Craig (R-Idaho) because he made some odd foot and hand movements in an airport men's room. But the person they should be going after, and not just because of the quagmire in Iraq, is Bush, a bigger disaster for the Republican Party than even his colleagues might think. For the Bush administration's

singular accomplishment, aside from demonstrating why unilateral military intervention is a road to ruin, has been to discredit the alleged virtues of free-market ideology.

The neocons' and Reagan's crowning achievement in the '80s was to reverse the 50-year notion, established by the New Deal, that the government had a crucial role in moderating the effects of unchecked capitalism on everyday people. The neocons especially attacked Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs as failures. Antipoverty programs, welfare, the school lunch program, prenatal care for poor women and all government regulations hadn't worked, they claimed, and even made things worse: They promoted a "culture of dependency" that robbed people of the motivation to improve their own lives.

The most effective, fair and *wise* gyroscope for modulating economic swings and distributing social and economic goods was "the market." The market optimizes outcomes for all, so the mantra went. The government, by contrast, was inefficient and unfair, giving the greatest benefits to the most undeserving sectors of society. Watching shows like "Wall Street Week" with Louis Rukeyser, one saw and heard the market personified into some all-knowing, beneficent Buddha. The market "liked" certain things (downsizing always made it happy), "responded negatively" to other things, became "jittery" and the like. The market knew best.

By the time Bush and his much-vaunted "CEO presidency" came to roost, the notion that the government had a role to play in shaping public life was unspeakable. Grover Norquist advanced the Bush-Cheney position that if you "kill the taxes, you kill the government." From the EPA to the FDA to the Veteran's Administration to FEMA, that is exactly what Team Bush did.

So, what is the track record of "the market," especially under Bush? How has it done, compared, to say, all those inefficient unfair government programs of yore?

Where to start? Leaving healthcare to the foresight of the market has meant that 47 million Americans—6 million more than when Bush took office, and nearly 16 percent of the population—do not have health insurance. The sagacity of the market has also meant that more than 600,000 children joined the ranks of the uninsured just since last year.

Having jettisoned LBJ's "War on Poverty," the United States now boasts the highest child poverty rate in the developed world: nearly 27 percent. In other countries like France, Sweden and Germany, government programs helped slash their rates to 10 percent or less. (When Johnson launched the "War on Poverty in 1964," the rate was 19 percent; ten years later it was 11.2 percent. What a failure.)

On the environment, Bush has sought to curb the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) because the market—in this case, industry—is the superior regulator. There are too many cases here to innumerate, but under Bush, the EPA has weakened pollution laws or postponed their implementation until the next decade, raised the arsenic-in-tap

water standards, allowed snowmobiling in national parks, and opened up national forests to the timber industry. The result? Millions of Americans are still exposed to unhealthy air pollution, and 20 million acres of wetlands have been removed from protection under the Clean Water Act.

What happens when we let the market decide which drugs are good and which are bad? Under Bush, FDA enforcement against false and misleading ads declined precipitously as we were bombarded by ever more ads for prescription drugs that sounded official because they had X's in their names. The FDA's enforcement of manufacturing standards for producers of vaccines dropped by 80 percent between 2002-2004. The market missed that Vioxx, for example, could kill people, or that other drugs like Celebrex and Bextra might have some problems.

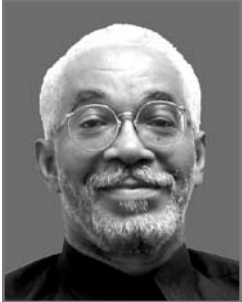
And two years after Katrina, need we say anything about the government's preparedness for natural disasters?

Everywhere, the safety net—except for the rich—has been shredded under Bush. He's gone so far that people are rediscovering that we do need strong, well-funded government agencies to prevent us from devolving into a third-world nation. The Democrats may have their work cut out for them in reversing the nearly 30-year-old mantra that the market is the best regulator and the government is the worst, but they have two things on their side: the increasingly widespread, dispiriting experiences of everyday people at the hands of "the market," and the facts. ■

The Bush administration's singular accomplishment has been to discredit the alleged virtues of free-market ideology.

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

Smearing Israel's Critics



DEPAUL UNIVERSITY CANCELED courses taught by Norman Finkelstein, the controversial political science professor known for his forthright criticism of Israel, just a week before classes resumed in June. Finkelstein, who taught at DePaul for six years, was denied tenure at the Chicago school but permitted to teach for the one year remaining on his contract.

In late August, however, the university decided to axe him and pulled his required books from the schools' bookstore. This was a break from the academic tradition that grants a faculty member who is denied tenure one last year (the "terminal year") in the classroom. Finkelstein initially vowed to protest his suspension, but later reached an agreement (including a monetary settlement) with DePaul to end his fight. However, even as he announced the agreement, Finkelstein charged his tenure denial was due "to external pressure resulting in a national hysteria."

Finkelstein's rough treatment followed a vigorous national campaign initiated by right-wing supporters of Israel to taint his name. They attacked Finkelstein for his scholarship, which has consistently excoriated the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and the deceitful arguments of the Jewish state's uncritical supporters. And Finkelstein is just one of many public figures currently under attack for contesting the conventional wisdom about Israel.

Harvard law professor and avid Zionist Alan Dershowitz mounted a relentless public campaign to have Finkelstein dismissed. Surely it is no coincidence that Finkelstein's recent book, *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History*, is a sustained, well-researched attack on Dershowitz and his ilk for their lurid distortions of history on behalf of Israel.

DePaul's political science department and a college-wide faculty committee overwhelmingly backed Finkelstein's tenure bid. Yet that was not enough to shield him from the national campaign to punish him for his acerbic criticism of Israel. An influential dean persuaded the tenure panel to reject him for the style and tone of his scholarship rather than its content.

Finkelstein's boosters argue that right-wing supporters of Israel are persecuting him for his strident opposition to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and

for his criticism that they are unscrupulously exploiting the horror of the Holocaust to justify Israeli excesses. Finkelstein's previous book, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, makes the case that many Holocaust scholars use the tragedy to justify Israel's existence and continue to utilize it to extort guilt money from various sources.

Finkelstein also provokes ire from Jewish groups because he is the son of two Holocaust survivors, which gives his critiques more credence. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has repeatedly accused Finkelstein of being a Holocaust denier, a baseless charge.

The former DePaul professor's supporters claim his tenure denial is completely unjustified and that his suspension violates academic ethics. The *Chicago Tribune*

reported that the American Association of University Professors would soon launch a protest of Finkelstein's treatment as a violation of normal academic procedure.

Finkelstein thus joins former president Jimmy Carter, NYU

historian Tony Judt, Harvard University professor Stephen Walt and University of Chicago professor John Mearsheimer (the latter two are co-authors of a new book, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*) whose forthright criticism of Israel have earned them accusations of anti-Semitism.

Jimmy Carter is facing a firestorm of criticism from right-wing American Jewish organizations for his book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, which mildly condemned the Jewish state's occupation policies in the Palestinian territories.

Judt, a descendant of Holocaust victims who argues that power in Israel has tragically shifted to religious fundamentalists and territorial zealots, is another victim of this pressure. The history professor, who also speaks out against American Jewish groups' attempts to stifle honest discussion on Israel's policies, has been forced to cancel many speaking engagements because of pressure from Jewish organizations.

Similar reactions have greeted Professors Walt and Mearsheimer, who have co-authored a book arguing that the American-Israel lobby has pushed policies that are not in the United States' best interests and encourage Israel to engage in self-destructive behavior. The two respected scholars have been denounced as anti-Semites by ADL Director Abraham Foxman, among others.

These scholars are victims of a national campaign to punish scholarship that challenges media-made myths about Israel. This grave threat to academic freedom should concern American progressives, who often remain eerily silent. ■

Finkelstein's rough treatment followed a national campaign initiated by right-wing supporters of Israel to taint his name.

BY H. CANDACE GORMAN

Inside the 'Secret Facility'



THE "PROTECTIVE ORDER," issued by the U.S. Federal Court for the D.C. District, establishes the ground rules for the "attorney client relationship" with our Gitmo clients. These are the rules that we (habeas counsel) must follow or else face being held in contempt of court. The attorney-client privilege is one of many legal niceties that disappeared under the protective order. We are also barred

from telling a client "secret information" from his files. (The absurdity is underscored by the fact that we cannot even tell a client "secret evidence" that he originally provided.) Although the protective order is a legally binding, the military routinely disregards it and the courts routinely turn a blind eye.

When I meet with my client, al-Ghizzawi, it is usually in one of the interrogation rooms. My client sits across the tiny table with one foot shackled to the floor. A camera in the corner looks down on us. The sound is (supposedly) turned off. I don't believe that no one is listening, but that is what the protective order prescribes. Under the protective order, when the meeting is over, I turn over my notes to the military escorts in a sealed envelope. On the outside of the envelope I mark whether I want my notes sent to the "privilege team" for "declassification" or if I want my notes put in my drawer at the "secret facility." (The "secret facility" is the office the government set up, in a location I have sworn not to disclose, for habeas counsel to work on "secret" stuff.) I opt for declassification and the military eventually sends my notes to the "privilege team," which is composed of Department of Defense lawyers who are not supposed to take part in proceedings against the detainees.

It takes anywhere from 10 days to five weeks for my notes to make it from Guantánamo to D.C. When the "team" declassifies my notes, they fax a copy to me and put the original in my drawer at the "secret facility."

You might wonder why I would turn over the notes to the privilege team when I can safely tuck them away in my drawer at the secret place. I cannot talk or write about what my clients tell me unless it is first vetted with Big Brother. I can share my notes with the judge, but I would have to prepare this shared document in the "secret facility" and file it under seal. I could also share

the information with other habeas counsel that have a security clearance, but not over the phone or email. We have to physically meet at the "secret facility" or in any closed office, but only if the curtains are drawn. (No, I am not making this up.) Once the notes are declassified, I can use them as I see fit. As they have contained no big dark secrets, all of my notes have been declassified.

Also under the protective order, my attorney-client mail goes to the privilege team. The team opens my letters, but this time they are not supposed to read them (hmmm). They are just looking for physical contraband—staples, paper clips and other dangerous items. They have two days to check for those items and then the letter is supposed to be sent to the base where they have two days to get it to my client. Some letters never

get there, most letters take weeks, even months to get from attorney to client.

When I visit with my clients, I always bring all of my letters and my clients' letters so that we can review what has been received. It is

a tedious process but it is important to know what information was "lost" in the system.

During my last visit to the base in July, the military added a new rule (one not found in the protective order). I can no longer bring attorney-client letters to meetings if they are in Arabic, unless an Arabic translator reviews the letters first for information that *he thinks* I should not give to my client. I learned of the new rule when I went to my meeting with my usual stack of letters in English and Arabic. An Arabic translator was brought over to "review" my letters. He stood there and read the letters while I complained to the military attorney, who was busy ignoring the legal violation.

When the translator finished reading my attorney-client letters, he announced that they were not "legal" letters but "personal letters." I turned to him and declared rather indignantly that not only were the letters legal mail but that they had already been submitted to the privilege team and my client probably had the originals with him in our meeting room 25 feet away. The translator looked mildly sheepish and said, "Oh, ok, I guess you can bring them in."

And that is how it goes. Some unknown contract employee now decides what I can bring to my client meeting—protective order (as bad as it is) be damned. ■

CONTACT H. Candace Gorman at hcgorman@igc.org.

I cannot talk or write about what my clients tell me unless it is first vetted by Big Brother.

BY LAURA S. WASHINGTON

Let's Pry Open Those Cold, Dead Hands



THE NATIONAL NEWS polls suggest that the majority of Americans support more gun control.

You wouldn't know it from the mail I get. Whenever I write about the plague of gun violence, I get a huge blowback from the gun lovers of America.

The rabid response of the gun lobby is damning, but impressive. They out-gun, out-email, gun-control advocates by more than 20 to one. Their ability to organize

a rapid response is exactly the opposite of FEMA. The gun army, made up almost exclusively of white men from suburban and rural areas, is loaded for bear.

The People of the Gun are beating their drums on websites from Keepandbeararms.com in Washington State, to alphacca.com in Vermont. Every time a plea for gun restrictions surfaces on the Internet, the gun stalwarts furiously post hundreds of missives in homage to the Second Amendment.

Through organizing, the Internet, and plunking down plenty of cold hard cash, the gun lobby has proven it is ready for primetime. Meanwhile, its opponents are languishing in the wee-hours of late-night local cable.

After last spring's massacre at Virginia Tech, ABC News polled adults nationwide and asked: "Do you favor or oppose stricter gun control laws in this country?" Sixty-one percent favored them, 36 percent were opposed and 3 percent were "unsure."

That majority is represented by well-meaning citizen groups, like the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, and graying civil rights stalwarts like the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson and his Rainbow/PUSH. Their tactic is to organize anti-gun marches and rallies to push for stricter gun laws and penalties. But here's a news flash: No one is listening.

Marches may generate publicity, but they don't influence decision makers. If we are going to keep pistols and assault rifles away from the playlots, family shopping malls and our colleges and universities, progressives must "bare" our arms.

The lethal success of the gun lobby is rooted in its ability to sway legislators of both Democratic and Republican persuasion. Democratic deer hunters in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan and Ohio are susceptible to NRA dictates, forcing many faint-of-heart, national Democratic candidates to eschew gun control.

The majority's collective voice is being ignored. The

anti-gun movement must mount a strong response.

Gun control activists: start playing the other side's game by embracing technology. Progressives: harness the Internet and aim it at Democratic and independent voters.

Fight fire with emails and a focused response. Gun control advocates should piggyback on the success of online activist groups like MoveOn.org and MeetUp.com. These efforts have raised millions to promote political candidates and the antiwar movement. The money is there. Barack Obama, for one, has raised over \$17 million on the Internet. Marches and protests are fine, but it is imperative to devise a response that is sophisticated and symmetrical to the gun lobby's tactics.

The NRA has built a juggernaut of a website that networks gun advocates from hither to yon. A modest investment and some digital

ingenuity could pave the way for digital networks in black churches, sororities and other civic groups in black urban America to fight back.

Women and the African-American church—get them

behind the keyboard, and you'll unleash a thunderous counterpunch to the gun lovers' old one-two.

African Americans have plenty of motivation. According to a recent report by the U.S. Justice Department, nearly half the people murdered in the United States in 2005 were black. Most lived in cities and were felled by guns. While blacks make up about 13 percent of the nation's population, they comprised 49 percent of all murder victims.

The Rev. Michael Pfleger knows the numbers. In June, Pfleger and Jackson were arrested for criminal trespassing during a protest outside a gun shop in a Chicago suburb. Pfleger, pastor of St. Sabina's, an African-American Catholic Church on Chicago's South Side, has been crusading for stricter regulation of gun shops and manufacturers. Pfleger is in agony over the 34 school-age children in Chicago who were killed by gun violence in the first six months of 2007.

St. Sabina's 2,200-member congregation is 70 percent female. Pfleger, who happens to be white, is recruiting the pastors at neighboring churches to get into the fight. "The church should be leading the path," he says. "Women are much more vocal. I believe partly because of their sensitivity to the murder of children. Historically, women are much more progressive. That's why churches are so vital, because women make up the main membership."

Amen, Father.

Get those ladies organized, and watch out! ■

The lethal success of the gun lobby is rooted in its ability to sway legislators of both Democratic and Republican persuasion.

On Strike Without a Union

Cygnus employees prove they are a 'pea that weighs a pound'

BY KARI LYDERSEN

WHEN A HUMAN RESOURCE manager told immigrant workers at the Cygnus soap and detergent factory on Chicago's far south side on July 25 that they had to prove their legal status within 15 days or be fired, they took matters into their own hands. The next day, 118 workers walked out and formed a picket line, going on strike even though no union represented them.

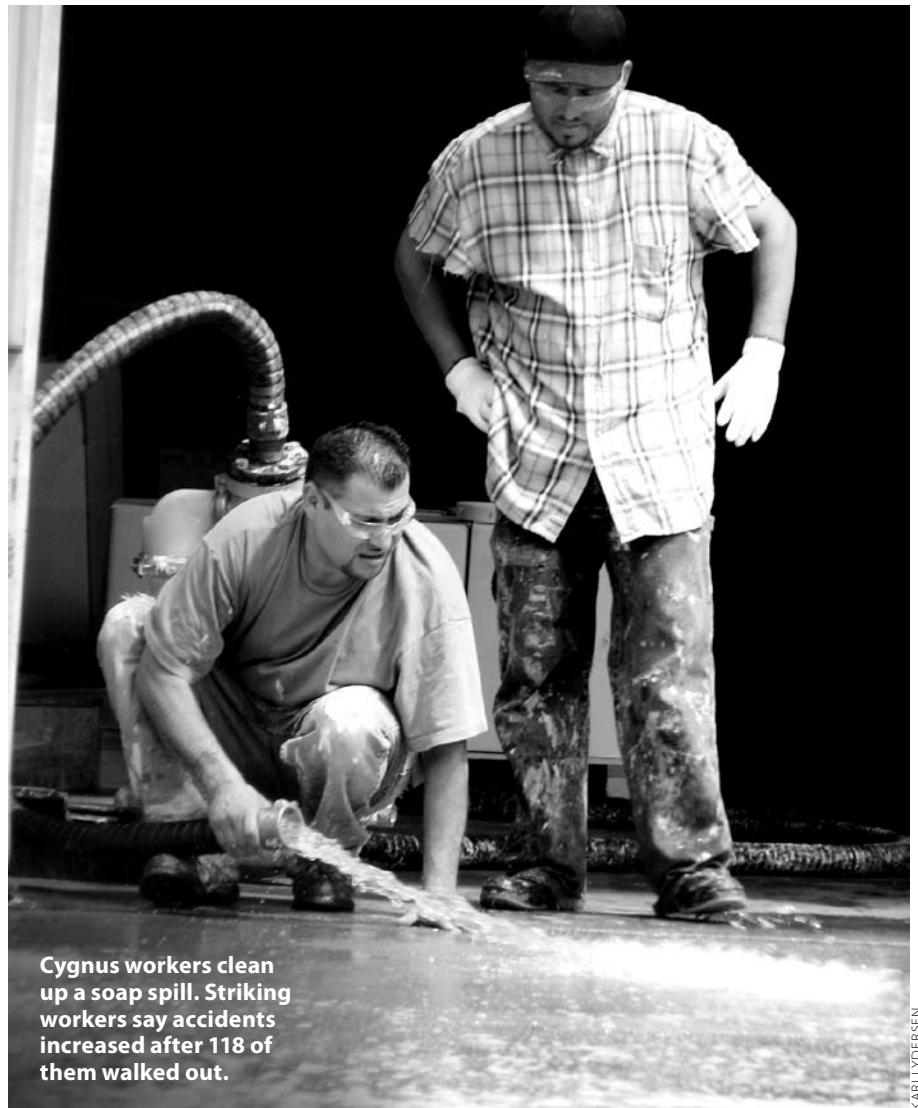
What followed is a scenario that is likely to become increasingly common as the country forges ahead with a new immigration enforcement mandate without comprehensive immigration reform.

Cygnus employee Francisco Reyes says he was told that if he and other workers couldn't prove that they were in the country legally by Aug. 10, they would be fired because in 2005 the Social Security Administration sent Cygnus a "no-match" letter saying that social security numbers being used by their workers didn't jibe with agency records. Further, says Reyes, the fired workers were expected to train replacements that were being brought in. Cygnus managers did not respond to multiple calls for comment.

"We had no choice but to go on strike," says Reyes in Spanish. A 39-year-old father of two, he has lived in this country 18 years.

No-match letters originated as an administrative tool to correct Social Security records, but have since been used as a red flag that a worker is undocumented. (See "No Match, No Mas," September). Although the letters explicitly state that they should not be used as a basis for firing, employers have frequently used the letters as an excuse—albeit an illegal one—to get rid of workers who are organizing or making waves.

After Congress failed to pass an immigration reform bill this summer, on Aug. 10 Homeland Security Secretary Mi-



Cygnus workers clean up a soap spill. Striking workers say accidents increased after 118 of them walked out.

KARI LYDERSEN

chael Chertoff announced a government plan to increase workplace enforcement based on no-match letters. Increasing numbers of no-match letters will be sent out and employers must resolve the issue or fire the worker in question within 90 days or risk a heavy fine.

The new rule ignores the fact that the Social Security Administration database

is estimated by the Office of the Inspector General to be only about 60 percent correct, with numerous errors related to married names and multiple names traditionally used by Latinos. Many Latinos with citizenship or permanent residency are likely to get no-match letters and possibly be fired under the new plan. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez described the

plan as a way to highlight the need for broader immigration reform; but until that happens, workers and employers will be caught between a rock and a hard place.

The likely result is that employers will continue to skirt the law, and further exploit immigrant workers in the process. Arnaldo Garcia, human rights project director for the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, notes that many employers faced with no-match letters—including a microbrewery he recently dealt with—simply fire their workers then rehire them under new names and social security numbers for less pay.

“They’ll say ‘You’re my buddy, I’m going to fire and rehire you.’” Garcia says. “So the process starts all over again. They’ll rehire them in different ways, or subcontract them, or just exploit them by paying them under the table without benefits.”

In fact, 110 out of the 118 striking Cygnus workers were subcontracted employees hired through a temporary staffing agency, Total Staffing Solutions, even though most had worked there for two to nine years. Along with demanding their jobs back, the striking workers asked for higher wages—most made just \$6.50 an hour—and that the company hire them all as permanent employees.

Without the help of a union or strike fund, the workers manned a picket line daily, foregoing badly-needed wages and braving the hottest days of summer. They got some support from unions—the International Association of Machinists District 8 expressed interest in organizing them, the UFCW Local 881 donated \$500 and Teamsters truck drivers refused to cross the picket line.

The strike made an impact. “Yesterday, seven trailers left empty,” says striking worker Evo, a 25-year-old from Mexico City, in Spanish, as he peered through a chain link fence at Cygnus workers hosing away suds residue from a spill on Aug. 9. “The new workers cause a lot of accidents. Now they have three or four stevedores in one line where there used to be one, because they can’t work as fast as we did. The line is very hard—whites and blacks will leave after the first shift.”

Evo and other workers reported working 10 to 12 hour days with abrasive chemicals, no safety equipment and poor ventilation. Evo lifted his soccer jersey to show off scars from chemical burns on

his arms and chest. He said he coughs constantly from inhaling dust from the ingredients in powdered soap.

After two weeks on the picket line, the workers won a ground-breaking victory. A negotiator summoned by Cygnus’ parent company, New York-based Marietta Corp., flew out to meet with workers and Cygnus managers. The company first offered to hire back the eight permanent Cygnus employees, but the permanent workers had agreed it was all or none. So after about four hours, the company consented to hire everyone back at their previous wages.

“This was 100 immigrant workers with no union beating a Fortune 500 company,” says immigrant rights organizer Jorge Mujica.

“I’m realizing there must be many other companies in this situation,” says worker Salvador Peres, 22, in Spanish, hanging out on the steps next to the

company as the negotiations stretched on. “If we have a victory here, it could help others in the same situation.”

Mujica describes the significance of the Cygnus victory with a Spanish expression about a “garbanzo de libra”—a pea that weighs a pound. He says this situation and others like it should be an impetus for unions to do a better job of organizing immigrants, and for union contracts to include language on how companies will deal with no-match letters. More importantly, it sends a message to employers that they fire workers based on no-match letters at their own risk.

“This should be a lesson for other companies not to screw up like this,” Mujica says. “They give you a no-match letter, you go on strike. If you fire an undocumented worker you have to replace him with another undocumented worker, because no one else will work for these wages.” ■

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UNIONBUSTING



BY ARTHUR LEVINE

IF YOU THOUGHT the union movement was in decline—*Think Again!* So read an online ad for a recent seminar in Las Vegas that promised to help me remain union-free. Actually, I *had* thought the union movement was in decline, but I'm an open-minded sort, so I was willing to be persuaded otherwise. I paid my \$1,595 and signed up. Organized by seminar-specialty firm Executive Enterprises, it would be led by attorneys from Jackson Lewis, one of the leading law firms in the field of union-busting, which has become a multibillion-dollar industry encompassing more than 2,500 lawyers and consultants offering their services. The classes would take place in the Las Vegas Westin Casuarina, which promises its guests "a sanctuary in the midst of bustling excitement" as well as craps, blackjack and three-card poker. I booked a room.

I knew I was taking a chance. Most outsiders don't know what happens in these seminars, because the firms that specialize in them have their feelers out for spies. Union organizers and curious journalists are especially unwelcome. As much as I enjoy Las Vegas in its own right, a night of Carrot Top would not make up for being expelled from union-busting class. I therefore checked in as Arthur S. Levine, the (real) vice-president of my family's real estate company, which owns one small building. This seemed to satisfy the people at the check-in table, who were careful not to say why we all were there. I was glad I found it at all: The seminar was kept so hush-hush that the name Jackson Lewis didn't appear

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on the sign outside the door.

Inside the seminar room, I picked a spot behind several rows of tables and chairs facing the lectern at the front. Things got off to a delayed start, however. Apparently, one of the registrants waiting to get in merited a closer background check. A grim, ferret-faced man paced outside the seminar room, fielding calls on his cell phone. He wore a pink shirt and pink silk tie. Hovering close by was a younger colleague, a burly fellow with a well-tailored dark suit and a Fu Manchu mustache. After consulting quickly with each another, the two men reached a verdict. The younger guy strode over to an unoccupied seat in our classroom and, with evident pleasure, picked up a place card. "Richard," he announced,

"is no longer with us," ostentatiously ripping Richard's place card in two.

As it turned out, the two men who had purged Richard would be our seminar leaders. The older man in pink was Michael J. Lotito, a 30-year veteran of anti-union legal wars. The younger was Michael Stief, III, a protégé and fast learner. I soon saw they knew their turf well. "We're not moralists," explained Lotito. "We're lawyers."

Once the seminar got underway, I learned that all of us were doing the right thing in resisting unions. "We believe that the union is irrelevant for the 21st century," declared Lotito. Unfortunately, "unions have new weapons." To make his point, he waved a clipping from the *New York Times* describing some recent public relations woes of

Wal-Mart. “The risk for some organizations is not that you’re going to be organized from within,” he advised us. “It’s that you’re going to be organized from *without*.”

My fellow students, of whom there were about 20, came from various

legitimate issues about how they were treated in the workplace? Yes! There was no safety, no security, no benefits.” But they, he explained, were a lot different from today’s whiners. “We didn’t have employees say: It’s my God-given right to have health insurance.”

out. “It’s going to cost you some money to remain union-free, sometimes big money.” But it was money well spent—especially, he noted, if Hillary Clinton should become president. The name seemed to send a chill through the room. “We’re lucky to have a George

Lotito faced a personnel manager in the audience and took on a mock hillbilly accent: ‘You owe me health insurance! It just ain’t fair!’ This elicited a few chuckles.

parts of the country. We got to know one another a little when Lotito invited us to share our reasons for taking the course. It became like a support group. “We want to go to union-free, but we’ve got a bullseye on our back,” explained Martin, a tough-looking distribution supervisor for a food services company. “It’s a big threat.”

Donna, a human resources manager for a discount chain store with a gung-ho manner, was more upbeat. “I’ve never dealt with unions, and I’m dedicated to making sure that we keep them out of our distribution center,” she vowed. “It’s my mission!”

Soon, it was my turn. “Hi I’m Art Levine,” I ventured. “We own some rental property in Queens and I’m concerned about organizing among our employees.” This was flat enough to pass muster.

First, appear respectful

One of the first things I learned from Lotito and Stief was to try to come across as respectful of labor’s concerns. “The goal is not to be union-free,” explained Stief. “It’s to be *issue-free*.” We were advised to institute an open-door policy with employees, encouraging them to air any grievances or concerns fully. Not only would this keep them happy, it would help us to sniff out whether there was unionization afoot.

Lotito informed us that his father had been a New York dockworker. “Back then, in 1935, [unions] made perfect sense,” Lotito said. “Did they have

Lotito stopped pacing, faced a personnel manager in the audience, and, slumping his body, took on a mock hillbilly accent: “You owe me health insurance! It just ain’t fair! You owe me health insurance!” This got a few chuckles.

Lotito reserved particular disdain for executives who don’t fight back, laying into a Kaiser Permanente exec who had apparently told the press that the HMO would remain “neutral” while the SEIU organized workers. In a mincing voice, Lotito parodied the Kaiser executive: “It is part of our strategic objective to work with SEIU.”

“Give me a frickin’ break!” he shouted. “Unions think money grows on trees!”

Fighting unions

By most measures, unions aren’t in very good shape. Only eight percent of private-sector workers today are unionized, compared to nearly 30 percent in the ’50s. Enforcement of labor laws, already weak, has become almost nonexistent under the current White House’s National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). And the pro-union Employee Free Choice Act can’t get past a filibuster in the Senate.

But Lotito repeatedly cautioned us against complacency. “They’ll attempt to destroy you no matter how good you are,” he warned. “The better you are, the bigger target you are.” And he reminded us, indirectly, why we would probably need Jackson Lewis to help us

Bush labor board,” Lotito said.

If Jackson Lewis wished to emphasize any peril above all, it was that of Andy Stern, president of the 1.8-million-member Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the largest and fastest-growing union in the country. In a CNBC interview screened for the class, Stern told an interviewer, “I think we need to find ways to add value to employers and not make them uncompetitive.” Stern also pointed out that union workers make an average of \$9,000 more per year and are twice as likely as non-union workers to have health insurance.

When the lights went back up, Stief shook his head. “Very impressive,” he said. “Would your people find him inspiring? Yes, they would.”

So how should we managers face down the threat? Lotito, slackening his jaw and assaying a blue-collar brogue, turned to Ken, a mild-mannered human resources executive for a printing company, and asked, “Boss, do we have a position on unions?”

Ken shifted in his seat and ventured an answer: “We don’t like ‘em.”

“I was listening to this Andy Stern guy,” Lotito continued, “and he says he wants to add value to our organization and find new ways to cooperate.” His tone turned mock-tearful: “He says our future is taking care of our children.” Several classmates laughed.

Ken was at a loss, so Lotito suggested a positive “mission statement.” In a rote manner, he recited examples: “We pro-

vide dignity and respect for our employees as part of our core values.” And so forth. The executives eagerly wrote them down.

How to bust

Frightening us with stories of unionization was only one component of the

“My uncle is in the UFCW and I met an organizer with them, Rob Youblind. I need to fill out a card about interest in a union. What should I do with the card?”

Kevin didn’t know. Stief advised him to warn his employee of the dangers of signing his names to such a document. “It’s a

jerked his tie upwards against his neck to suggest a hanging—the only time the lawyers openly hinted at lawbreaking.

What if we simply wanted to fire union organizers? That was possible to do, said Stief, as long as you were careful to do so for other reasons. “Union sympathizers

‘You know what we do with a supervisor who says, “Hey boss, it wasn’t me, they said it was the company”?’ Stieff asked. He jerked his tie upwards against his neck to suggest a hanging—the only time the lawyers openly hinted at lawbreaking.

program. A second was an overview of the many dos and don’ts of union-busting. Should we need more detailed legal advice, Jackson Lewis, of course, stood at the ready.

One such scenario dealt with union authorization cards being circulated at a factory. Stief, playing a confused worker, turned to a hotel executive named Kevin. “How are you doing, boss?” said Stief.

legally binding contract, it’s like a power of attorney, it’s like signing a blank check,” Stief said. “When you talk to them, bring it down to their level.”

Another example dealt with a supervisor who had harbored sympathy towards union organizing. “You know what we do with a supervisor who comes to you and says, ‘Hey, boss, it wasn’t me, they said it was the company?’” asked Stieff. He

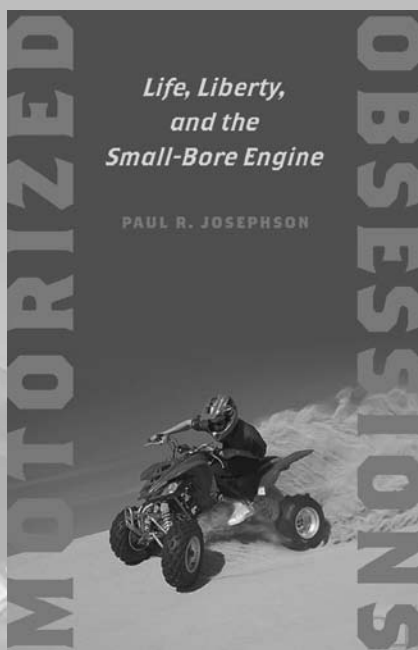
aren’t entitled to any more protection than other workers,” he explained. But the firing could not be linked to their union activity.

What if we felt like saying a lot of anti-union stuff to our workers? Lotito introduced a segment called “You Can Say It.” Could we tell our workers, for instance, that a union had held strike at a nearby facility only to find that all the strikers had been replaced—and that the same could happen to the employees here? Sure, said Lotito. “It’s lawful.” He added, “What happens if this statement is a lie? They didn’t have another strike, there were no replacements? It’s still lawful: The labor board doesn’t really care if people are lying.”

But if everything failed, and we found ourselves negotiating with a newly formed union, then we still shouldn’t lose heart. Instead, we could continue to undermine the union by rejecting all of its demands during negotiations. (In fact, in about a third of the cases after a union victory, employers don’t even agree to a contract.) The trick was in how to word refusals. First, with a shout, Stief demonstrated what not to say in response to a demand for increased wages: “I’m not listening to no stinkin’ wage increases!” He resumed his normal voice: “Does that sound like good faith? No.” Then Stieff showed us the proper alternative: “I’m not inclined to agree to that proposal at this time.” He observed. “Does that sound like good faith? Yes, but I’m saying the same thing I did before.” The lesson? “You can say no to anything.”

If such examples were intended to sell us on the idea of hiring legal experts, the irony is that Jackson Lewis has advised companies that have sometimes gotten

The first comprehensive history of the small-bore engine and the technology it powers—from dirt bikes and jet skis to weed wackers and snowblowers—explores the political, environmental, and public health issues surrounding one of America’s most dangerous pastimes. Paul R. Josephson’s compelling history leads to one irrefutable conclusion: **these machines cannot be operated without loss of life and loss of habitat.**



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into serious legal trouble. In the case of EnerSys, a South Carolina battery plant that retained Jackson Lewis at a cost of \$2.7 million to thwart unionization, things got so bad that the NLRB eventually filed a complaint against EnerSys, accusing it of 120 violations of labor law, leading to a \$7.75 million settlement with federal officials. EnerSys, for its part, would subsequently sue Jackson Lewis for engaging in what it termed “a relentless and unlawful campaign to oust the union.” (EnerSys was apparently astonished to learn that the union-busting firm they’d hired had engaged in union-busting.) Jackson Lewis forcefully denied that it advised or engaged in wrongdoing. The case was recently settled under confidential terms.

At your service

I had learned much in our two days together, but for those of us who’d become attached to our new friends at Jackson Lewis, we could take solace in an additional half-hour of free phone consultation. I called Michael Stief to ask him how to get rid of possible union sympathizers. I explained my concern about the “master contract” the SEIU local had arranged with its residential buildings for \$18-per-hour porter salaries.

Stief assured me that the solution was essentially more Stief, or at least more Jackson Lewis, noting the New York branch’s expertise in challenging SEIU there. “That’s why you need us,” he said. “You’re not a mammoth company and you can’t afford a contract like that. The implications of that are not good for anybody.” What did he mean? “Between us, if you’re telling me that if you had to live under the master agreement, you’d be out of business and they’d be out of work—that’s what I mean,” he said. He added with a laugh, “There’s a legal way to say that.”

That’s where Jackson Lewis would come in. “Jackson Lewis was founded on the concept of preventive labor relations, and we want to help our clients before there’s full-blown organizing,” Stief told me. “We are a full-service law firm,” he stressed. “We just don’t do the legal stuff—we handle the campaign.”

I said I’d think about it. ■

ARTHUR LEVINE is a contributing editor of the Washington Monthly, who has also written for the American Prospect, the New Republic, and the Atlantic, among many other publications.

Union Busting’s Human Toll

THE ESTIMATED \$3,000 PER worker for each campaign spent on union-busting comes at a human cost that we didn’t learn about at the Las Vegas seminar. Just ask Bill Lawhorn, 51, a 12-year veteran of Ohio’s Consolidated Biscuit Company, who earned \$23,000 a year using a forklift at the receiving dock before being fired the day after a union election more than five years ago.

“I couldn’t believe it was happening,” he says of that day in August 2002 when he was summoned to the front office. “I did nothing wrong”—except speak up for the right to organize a union. He hasn’t found steady work since then. The day after he was fired, someone at the company sent his factory I.D. picture to the local police, where it was posted on the “Most Wanted” bulletin board next to a child molester.

For roughly three years after losing his job, Lawhorn woke up at 4 a.m. in his small town of Leipsic, Ohio, got into the decrepit 1972 Ford truck a friend lent him, and hauled trash for about 100 friends and neighbors who each paid him \$13 a month, mostly out of sympathy. With fuel and landfill costs rising lately, he stopped even that minimal work this past May and is now looking for any work.

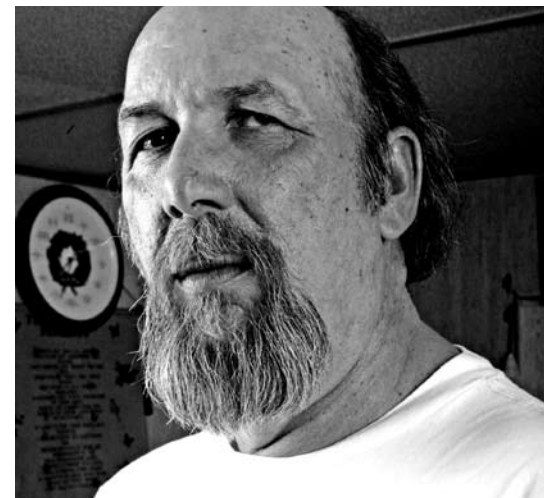
The effects of losing his job run beyond the monetary. “It’s always right there in my mind,” Lawhorn says. “My children thought I got really mean, and I did for that first year.” Back then, everyday, after a fruitless search for a new job, he would drink beer heavily. “I’m definitely a victim of union-busters,” he says. “They’re the ones who told [company officials] what to do.”

Attorneys from Eastman and Smith, along with consultant Ed Brown from Illinois-based Modern Management Inc., helped devise the strategies that cost Lawhorn his livelihood, according to former employees and organizers with the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco and Grain Millers International Union.

Even though an NLRB administrative judge ordered Lawhorn reinstated along with six other workers in January 2004, the NLRB, after dragging out the case for years, followed that up in April 2006 with an order saying that only Lawhorn and one other colleague should be reinstated.

But the company hasn’t complied, and union lawyers are still waiting for a federal court decision empowering the NLRB to implement its own directive.

The company fired Lawhorn for taking a union representative through the plant the day before the election to see if election notices were posted. The union-busters’ role in Lawhorn’s plight is confirmed by Herb Telford, a former maintenance su-

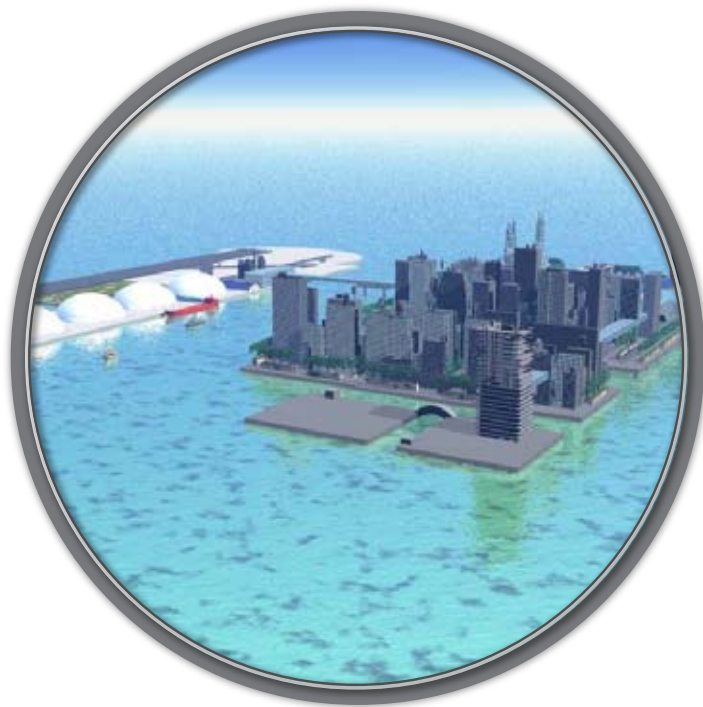


Bill Lawhorn

pervisor at the plant. “They wanted you to watch the union-pushers to see if they did anything wrong and we had twice weekly meetings with the union-busters,” he says. At one key meeting of supervisors before the election, Telford says he came early and saw the company’s president, James Appold, angrily telling the labor adviser about union sympathizers: “I own the company and I just want to get rid of them.”

The consultant allegedly told him, “Jim, these people are mine until the election, but once the election is held, you can do what you want to do.” That’s just what happened: The union lost the election, and Appold arranged the firings of several workers. Eastman and Smith, James Appold and Modern Management didn’t respond to repeated requests for comment.

Bill Lawhorn has lost faith in the government officials who should have protected him. “I expected them to do what they’re supposed to do,” he says. “This is my right, a federal right to form a union. All the company had to do [to avoid complying] was...nothing. It’s un-American.” ■



FLOATING UTOPIAS

The degraded imagination of the libertarian seasteaders

BY CHINA MIÉVILLE

FREEDOM IS LATE. Since 2003, a colossal barge called the Freedom Ship, of debatable tax status, should have been chugging with majestic aimlessness from port to port, a leviathan rover with more than 40,000 wealthy full-time residents living, working and playing on deck. That was the aim eight years ago when the project first made headlines, confidently claiming that construction would start in 2000.

A visit to the “news” section of freedomship.com reveals a more sluggish pace. The most recent messages date from more than two years ago, forlornly explaining how “scam operations” are slowing things down but that “[t]hings are happening, and they are moving fast.” Meanwhile, the ship is not yet finished. Indeed, it is not yet started. Despite this, Freedom Ship International Inc. has been startlingly successful in raising publicity for this “floating city.” Much credulous journalistic cooing over “the biggest vessel in history,” with its “hospitals, banks, sports centres, parks, theaters and nightclubs,” not to mention its airport, has ignored the vessel’s stubborn nonexistence.

Freedom Ship’s website claims that the vessel has not been conceived as a locus for tax avoidance, pointing out that as it will sail under a flag of convenience, residents may still be liable for taxes in their home countries. Nonetheless, whatever the ultimate tax status of those whom we will charitably presume might one day set sail, much of the interest in Freedom Ship has

revolved precisely around its perceived status as a tax haven.

And despite the apparent corrective on the website, the project’s officials have not been shy in purveying that impression. They have pushed promotional literature that, in the words of one journalist, “paints the picture of a luminous tax haven,” and stressed that the ship will levy “[n]o income tax, no real estate tax, no sales tax, no business duties, no import duties.” Of course, as no cruise ship could ever levy income tax, to trumpet that fact is preposterous, except as a propaganda strategy.

Freedom Ship’s board of directors are canny enough to recognize tax hatred as a defining characteristic of the tradition of fantasies in which it sits. It is one of countless recent dreams of a tax-free life on the ocean wave: advocates of “seasteading” are disproportionately adherents of “libertarianism,” that peculiarly American philosophy of venal petty-bourgeois dissidence.

Libertarianism is by no means a unified movement. As many of its advocates proudly stress, it comprises a taxonomy of bickering branches—minarchists, objectivists, paleo- and neolibertarians, agorists, et various al.—just like a real social theory. Claiming a lineage with post-Enlightenment classical liberalism, as well as in some cases with the resoundingly portentous blatherings of Ayn Rand, all of its variants are characterized, to differing degrees, by fervent, even cultish, faith in what is quaintly termed the “free” market, and extreme antipathy to that vaguely conceived bogeyman, “the state,” with its regulatory and fiscal powers.

Above all, they recast their most banal avarice—the disincli-

nation to pay tax—as a principled blow for political freedom. Not content with existing offshore tax shelters, multimillionaires and property developers have aspired to build their own. For each such rare project that sees (usually brief) life, there are many unfettered by actual existence, such as Laissez-Faire City, a proposed offshore tax haven inspired by a particularly crass and gung-ho libertarianism, that generated press interest in the mid-'90s only to collapse in infighting and bad blood; or New Utopia, an intended sea-based libertarian micro-nation in the Caribbean that degenerated with breathtaking predictability into nonexistence and scandal.

Floating cities are dreamed of because how cool is that?—an entirely legitimate, even admirable reason. The problem is not with the impulse itself but with how it is degraded by the class politics of free-market vulgarians.

However, one senses in even their supporters' literature a dissatisfaction with these attempts that has nothing to do with their abject failure. It is also psycho-geographical: There is something about the atolls, mounts, reefs and miniature islets on which these pioneers have attempted to perch that insults their dignity.

A parable from seasteading's past goes some way in explaining. In 1971, millionaire property developer Michael Oliver attempted to establish the Republic of Minerva on a small South Pacific sand atoll. It was soon off-handedly annexed by Tonga, and, in a traumatic actualized metaphor, allowed to dissolve back into the sea. To defeat the predatory outreach of nations and tides, it is clearly not enough to be offshore: True freedom floats.

Utopia degraded

Of course, visions of floating state evasion cannot always be explained by a hankering for tax evasion. There have been other precursors. Ships have allowed groups ranging from cheerfully illicit pirate radio stations to socially committed abortion providers, like Women On Waves, to avoid local laws. Not surprisingly, this use for ships has been enthusiastically adopted by businesses, such as SeaCode, which promotes locating outsourced foreign software engineers three miles off the coast of Los Angeles to avoid pesky immigration and labor laws.

It is the less instrumentalist iterations that inspire the imagination. Occasionally, in a spirit of can-do contrarianism, some offshore spit or rig has been designated an independent country, such as Sealand, a sea-tower-based nation with no permanent inhabitants on Britain's Suffolk coast. The startling notion of coagulated ship-city has unsurprisingly been featured in fiction, as in Lloyd Kropp's Sargasso-based *The Drift* and Neal Stephenson's "The Raft," in *Snow Crash*. It is a measure of how disastrous a film *Waterworld* was that its floating homesteads failed to hold the attention. The cultural fascination, however, remains.

Many of the projects currently under discussion cite ecological concerns as their rationale.

However, the more ambitious these projects are, the more vague their details and mechanics. The unbearably New-Age habitat of Celestopea is to be built of the wincingly punning and hypothetically enviro-friendly Seament. Clearly, the original rationale of seasteading is sheer utopian exuberance.

Floating cities are dreamed of because *how cool is that?*—an entirely legitimate, admirable reason. The archives of seasteading are irresistible reading, the best of the utopias are awesome, and floating-city imaginings are in themselves a delightful mental game. The problem is the crippling of this tradition by free-market vulgarians.

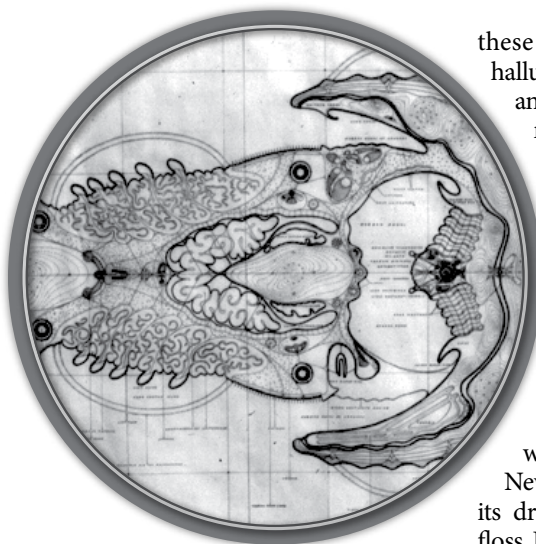
In these times, utopian imagination for its own sake has a bad rap, so some unconvincing instrumental rationale must be tacked on—yeah, save the planet, whatever. Among the rather cautious purposes architect Eugene Tsui lists for his proposed floating city of Nexus are the development of mariculture, clean energy and "experimental education programs": Reading these bullet points, one might almost forget that Nexus is a five-mile-long, self-propelling mountainous island shaped like a horseshoe crab. Its sheer beautiful preposterousness shouldn't be an embarrassment: It is the point of the dream, whatever the design specs say.

Utopianism has always had two, usually though not always contradictory, aesthetic and avant-gardist gravitational pulls: toward a hallucinatory baroque or, alternately, a post-Corbusier functionalism. In seasteading,



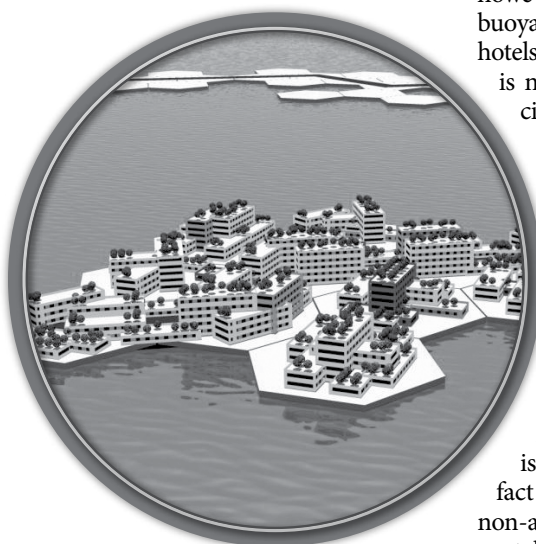
**Opposite page: A model of the Freedom Ship;
A model of a city in the nation of New Utopia**

IMAGES COURTESY OF: FREEDOMSHIP.COM, NEWUTOPIA.ORG



these iterations are represented by Tsui's hallucinatory organicism on one hand and Buckminster Fuller's extraordinary, floating, ziggurat-like Triton City on the other.

The libertarian seasteaders are heirs to this visionary tradition but degrade it with their class politics. They almost make one nostalgic for more grandiose enemy dreams. The uncompromising monoliths of fascist and Stalinist architecture expressed their paymasters' monstrous ambitions. The wildest of the libertarian seasteaders, New Utopia, manages to crossfertilize its drab Miami-ism with enough candy floss Las Vegas-ism to keep a crippled baroque distantly in sight. Freedom Ship, however, is a floating shopping mall, a buoyant block of midrange Mediterranean hotels. This failure of utopian imagination is nowhere clearer than in the floating city of the long defunct but still influential Atlantis Project.



It is a libertarian dream. Hexagonal neighborhoods of square apartments bob sedately by tiny coiffed parks and tastefully featureless marinas, an Orange County of the soul. It is the ultimate gated community, designed not by the very rich and certainly not by the very powerful, but by the middlingly so. As a utopia, the Atlantis Project is pitiful. Beyond the single one-trick fact of its watery location, it is tragically non-ambitious, crippled with class anxiety, nostalgic not for mythic glory but for the anonymous sanctimony of an invented 1950s. This is no ruling class vision: it is the plaintive daydream of a petty bourgeoisie, whose sulky solution to perceived social problems is to *run away*—set sail into a tax-free sunset.

None of this is surprising. Libertarianism is not a ruling-class theory. It may be indulged, certainly, for the useful ideas it can throw up, and its prophets have at times influenced dominant ideologies—witness the cack-handed depredations of the “Chicago Boys” in Chile after Allende's

bloody overthrow. But untempered by the *realpolitik* of Reaganism and Thatcherism, the anti-statism of “pure” libertarianism is worse than useless to the ruling class.

Big capital will support tax-lowering measures, of course, but it does not need to piss and moan about taxes with the tedious relentlessness of the libertarian. Big capital, with its ranks of accountant-Houdinis, just gets on with not paying it. And why hate a state that pays so well? Big capital is big, after all, not only because of the generous contracts its state obligingly hands it, but because of the gun-ships with which its state opens up markets for it.

Libertarianism, by contrast, is a theory of those who find it hard to avoid their taxes, who are too small, incompetent or insufficiently connected to win Iraq-reconstruction contracts, or otherwise chow at the state trough. In its maundering about a mythical ideal-type capitalism, libertarianism betrays its fear of actually existing capitalism, at which it cannot quite succeed. It is a philosophy of capitalist inadequacy.

Libertarianism's nemesis, “the state,” is no less abstract. This is particularly so for libertarianism's seasteading wing, for whom the political entity “the state” is bizarrely geographically literalized. Their intent is to slip the surly bonds of earth not up but sideways, beyond littoral borders. It is a lunatic syllogism: “I dislike the state: The state is made of land: Therefore I dislike the land.” Water is a solvent, dissolving “political” (state) power, leaving only “economics” behind.

‘The captain's word will be final’

Small communities *have* taken to the seas to escape oppressive state apparatuses. The miseries of refugee “boat people”—Indonesians, Haitians, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Afghanis and others—have been grotesquely real, but this has not given middlebrow utopians pause. The libertarian seasteader is a Pollyanna of exile.

There also have been genuine counter-cultural maritime polities, shipboard societies opposed to the despotism of state power, that might provide a genuine inspiration. Since the publication in 2000 of Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Redicker's *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, any discussion on *liberté sur mer* must reference the grassroots, democratic pirate “hydrarchies” that the authors rescued less from the condescension of history than from its



From the top: A schematic of Nexus: Mobile Floating Sea City; the pitiful utopia of the Atlantis Project; a model of the Celestopea Sea Dome

IMAGES COURTESY OF: CELESTOPEA.COM, EUGENE TSUI, NEWUTOPIA.ORG

pantomime audience booing.

But libertarians are political dissidents only in narrowly selfish directions. As respectful of “order” as the most polite bourgeois, they cannot conceive of pirates as antecedents, only as threats. (As indeed they might be, were there any seasteads to plunder.) By distancing themselves from this antiestablishment hydrarchy, the libertarian seasteaders unwittingly identify with the other hydrarchy that Linebaugh and Redicker discuss: the imperialist, maritime state. Coercive political apparatuses, operating internally and externally, are implicitly, sometimes explicitly, part of the libertarian seasteading project. Good Brechtians, we ask: Who is to maintain New Utopia, Laissez-Faire City, the Freedom Ship? Who will cook the feasts and clean the heads? So many reports. So many questions. The fantasists of libertarian seasteading are vague or silent about on-ship labor standards, preferring not to ponder who will swab the decks on which the offshore traders, speculators and Web entrepreneurs will promenade.

They cannot, however, entirely forget the need for other people, non-passengers. An attenuated anxiety about what such a presence reaches the libertarian mind as anxiety about *crime*—that shibboleth terror of the petty bourgeoisie, impossible to banish from the mind.

On Freedom Ship there will be a jail, a “squad of intelligence officers,” and a “private security force of 2,000, led by a former FBI agent, [that] will have access to weapons, both to maintain order within the vessel and to resist external threats.” And while technically the law applied would be that of whichever state lends its flag, Freedom Ship officials make no bones that “the captain’s word will be final.”

That is the authoritarianism at libertarianism’s core, the symbiosis between the “free market” and tyranny. Seasteading libertarians flee the oppression of bourgeois democracy for the tyranny of dictatorship. The need for internal repression is thus admitted. External repression is less hypothetical. It is already here.

Seasteading as empire

Speculation about *internal* labor conditions on these polities is anathema, as it raises unpleasant issues of working-class organization on the wrong side of the gate. *Externally*, no such conceptual constraints exist. Far from remaining vague, the usual charge leveled at utopians, the board of

Freedom Ship’s “realism” has made them gung-ho and explicit in describing the economic imperialism to which they aspire.

Freedom Ship Inc. has ostentatiously arranged with Honduran authorities to construct the vessel in the port of Trujillo, citing geographical advantages and cheap labor from the 10,000 to 20,000 workers they imagine exploiting. Locals are skep-

power there, that they can work their hustles with impunity.

Already, struggles against Freedom Ship have ensued. In April 2003, a protest march in Trujillo included farmers “protesting against the National Port Authority attempting to usurp their land (for local elites, multi-national tourism projects and the American venture ‘Freedom Ship.’).”

The fantasists of libertarian seasteading are vague about on-ship labor standards, preferring not to ponder who will swab the decks on which the offshore traders and Web entrepreneurs will promenade.

tical that anything will ever be built, but the project, despite being less “speculative” than utterly fanciful, has achieved a mass of absent presence sufficient to create real socioeconomic effects—attacks on labor, speculative bubbles and so on. In the words of the great activist science-fiction writer Lucius Shepard, who knows the region well:

[T]he Freedom Ship is scheduled to begin construction any day now in Trujillo. ... Many, including myself, believe it is a scam, but others are believers. Either way, it’s going to bring a whole new cast of characters into the place, grifters and entrepreneurs and so forth; and it testifies to the fact that foreigners—mostly Americans—believe they can come to Honduras and achieve wealth and

The protest was organized by the Comité de Emergencia Garifuna de Honduras, a grassroots group that represents the Garifuna minority, descendants of African slaves and indigenous Caribs and Arawaks. The ship is a stated reason for one of the many land grabs from the Garifuna, an expropriatory project so unsubtly iniquitous as to be almost camp. It is as if Freedom Ship’s partisans are so keen to prove their “realism” that only an ostentatious performance of imperialist theft will do the trick. According to the Comité, the Garifuna land is being eyed with the government’s active and official participation.

The most recent threat to Garifuna land rights emerged in September of 2002, in the

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protected reserve between the Caribbean Sea and the Guaymoreto Lagoon called Barranco Blanco. The National Port Company (ENP) a government body, to conduct a topographical survey of the Garfuna land, with the intention of renting out lands for the construction of "Freedom Ship." ... The local Garfuna community has legal title to this land, but when they asserted their ownership in meeting with the National Port Company, the Port Company went so far as to cite the "international war on terror" at the meeting as a reason for their usurpation of lands, claiming they needed the land to protect the banana boats of Dole Company which dock at nearby Puerto Castilla.

In one area at least, then, Freedom Ship is ahead of schedule. Its continuing non-existence has not stopped it from casting an imperial shadow. Freedom Ship is and will remain a castle in the air—or sea—but it has already laid foundations in someone else's land.

Class warfare as bad comedy

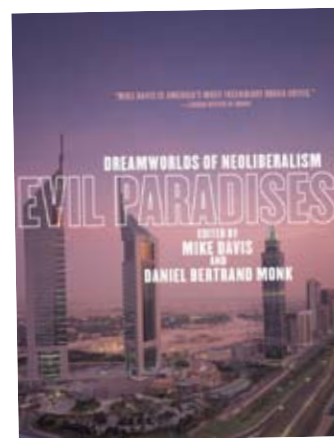
Today, the supposed imminent demise of the state—the perforation, dissolution and evaporation of its sovereignty and borders under the onslaught of commerce and capital—is asserted with considerably less vigor than during the boosterish early '90s.

The internationalization of capital was and remains real, however, and with that, inevitably, comes the migration of labor.

One would think that an avowedly anti-statist, laissez-faire movement would support the free movement of labor, as well as capital. To its credit, the Libertarian Party of the United States has enough rigor to take an open border position. But as the ferocious debate on its website suggests, the issue is hugely controversial.

Much libertarianism has a love-hate relationship with borders. Despite the timidity of some unions on the issue, true freedom of labor would strengthen the working class, an unacceptable outcome to the right wing. It is also cause for intellectual gymnastics on the part of libertarian ideologues eager to justify the exclusion of foreign workers from its borders.

Usually this involves conceptualizing the state as the "private property" of its legal inhabitants. However, when we read in the *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, the self-proclaimed "voice of scholarship in libertarian theory," that as part of the "natural order" you will find "Whites live among Whites and separate from Asians and blacks," or read the concern about "diseased immigrants" and the lament for a Los Angeles



This is an abridged version of "Floating Utopias: Freedom and Unfreedom of the Seas," reprinted from Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism (New Press, July).

with "crowds of immigrants, most of them probably illegal, roaming the streets in search of one knows not what," the despicable racial anxieties are blatant. For some libertarians, "liberty" is more negotiable than "aryan."

Of course, big capital gains from borders less from the fact that they keep workers out than in the manner that they allow workers in—the economic benefits of "illegals" are enormous, both directly and as a wedge, because of their extreme vulnerability and availability for hyper-exploitation. *Realpolitik* big capital, then, and the hysterical wing of libertarianism unite in their predilection for borders, though for different reasons.

Consequently, in the libertarian seastead, citizenship really *is* a ticket that must be bought—not a right nor a privilege but a commodity. The claim that the state is private property is more believable in such a pretend place than in the real world, where citizenship is not reserved for paying passengers. Of course, illegal immigration onto a floating city would be an impressive feat: another of the idea's charms. The dream is not of open borders, but of mobile ones, as ferociously exclusive as those of any other state, and more than most.

It is a small schadenfreude to know that these dreams will never come true. There are dangerous enemies, and then there are jokes of history. The libertarian seastealers are a joke. The pitiful, incoherent and cowardly utopia they pine for is a spoilt child's autarky, an imperialism of outsourcing, a very petty fascism played as maritime farce: Pinochet of Penzance. ■

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Obama's in the Eye of the Beholder

Can the junior senator from Illinois be both a stalwart progressive and a post-ideological unifier?

BY DAVID MOBERG

TAMA, IOWA—EVERY AUGUST FOR 46 years, until she retired two years ago, Duffy Lyon carved the butter cow sculpture that has occupied a place of honor at the Iowa State Fair. But newly inspired, this summer she crafted 17 pounds of butter into the campaign logo of Democratic presidential aspirant Barack Obama, proudly displaying her creation at an Obama forum on rural issues here.

"He's the kind of person who will represent us the best, better than Hillary," she says. "He's for people who haven't got things." Prominent dairy farmer Joe Lyon, like his wife an active 78-year-old independent who Bush turned into an ardent Democrat, adds, "We've got to have a change in Washington. I think it's

been a calamity—war, giveaways to the well-connected. I don't think we've seen anything like it in history. And we've just seen the tip of the iceberg. I don't know how long it will take to straighten out."

Many Democrats—and a surprising swath of Republicans and independents—think that first-term senator Barack Obama represents the best hope (his constant theme) to turn the country in a new direction. Whether attracted by his inspirational speeches, his fresh face, or his early opposition to the war in Iraq, people respond to Obama's personal story and what they think he represents for America, as much as to the policies he advocates.

But there are two Obamas running for president—or at least two political personas that voters see. One is the politi-

cally progressive Obama, leading in the national polls over rivals such as former Sen. John Edwards to be the left alternative to front-runner Hillary Clinton's centrist, establishment politics. The other is the post-partisan Obama, who will bring people together and transcend the morass of Washington politics that he is running against.

Both reflect Obama's political history, but the big question—for both his campaign and his potential presidency—is: How compatible are these two personas? To what extent does striving for post-partisanship conflict with—or complement—progressive political goals?

One Obama, two Obamas

Progressives often see Obama's ca-



Barack Obama speaks during an 'Evening in the Park with Barack Obama' on July 3, in Fairfield, Iowa.



Obama talks with Duffy Lyon, who made a butter sculpture of his campaign logo to show her support.

reer as evidence that he is a champion of grassroots democracy, and issues like ethics reform and national health insurance. "People have choices to make in life, and choices give you some insight into what they believe and what their values are," says Henry Bayer, director of AFSCME District Council 31 in Illinois. "Here's a guy who had his pick of what he could do, the world was open to him, and he became a community organizer, then went to law school, did civil rights and voter registration work," before becoming a reliably liberal state senator.

That personal history counts with voters. After an Iowa Federation of Labor candidate forum in Waterloo, Amalgamated Transit Workers Union local political director Lon Kammeyer—a bold "Live Union, Die Union" tattoo on his massive forearm—praised Obama for his candor about his experiences growing up and for his willingness more recently to campaign against Wal-Mart. "I like Barack," he says. "To me, he's just worked his way up, working with people who didn't have anything."

But many admirers—especially young people, people turned off to politics, and less partisan voters spanning the ideological spectrum—do not view Obama as a progressive or even a champion of the downtrodden. They see him as a plain-

speaking, uncorrupted, new force for change who wants to solve common problems and unite the country.

Pat Nelson—a politically independent, middle-aged, elementary school teacher—volunteered to help at an Obama rally held in August on the Cass County Fairgrounds in the small town of Atlantic, Iowa. Not a close follower of politics in past elections, she says she's paying more attention this time. "Whenever I listen to Obama, I get the feeling he's not a Republican, not a Democrat, but asking what can we do as a group to solve problems, and that intrigues me," she says. "We need to get over what Democrats and Republicans are for and think of what's important for the country."

Jim Lynam, 65, and his daughter, Emily, 20, both liked Obama's stand on the war in Iraq and the environment, but it is his charisma and novelty that excite them. "To me, he represents fresh air, change," Jim says. "I would support Hillary if she's nominated, but I wouldn't be happy because she brings old ideas. You know what she's going to say. She's not inventive. It's politics as usual. She speaks to please the audience. But he's not as corrupted by the system as people who've been swimming in it for years."

Even highly partisan, liberal Democrats, like 77-year-old retired union house

painter Herbert Abraham and his 53-year-old wife, Nancy, a home care worker, admire Obama's post-partisanship for a practical reason. "Of all the candidates, I can't think of one that can get crossover votes besides Obama," Herbert said at the Atlantic rally. "He can win, and we want the Democrats to win."

Indeed, in an intriguing University of Iowa Poll in early August, Obama received more support from Republican voters—6.7 percent—than all of the other Republican contenders except for Mitt Romney and Rudy Giuliani. And Obama argues that he can expand the politically viable territory for Democrats more than other candidates by both inspiring Southern blacks to vote and attracting more rural, religious voters.

All together now

In his stump speeches, like the one he gave at the Atlantic fairgrounds, Obama pits the "generosity of spirit and decency of the American people" against the corruption of politics, adroitly making himself the vehicle of his listeners' most noble impulses. Large crowds turn out for his campaign, he says, not because of what he's doing but "because Americans all across the country are desperate for change. They want something new. They want to take this country in a new direction. Part of it is a response to the last six years and the sense that the challenges and difficulties you face here in Atlantic and people are facing all across the country have not been dealt with. We've got a lot of petty politics and a lot of negative advertising but when it comes to the challenges of this country, Washington hasn't done the job."

In an engaging and authoritative manner, he ticks off Bush's policy failures—health-care, education, energy, global warming, economic inequality, official contempt for the law, corruption, and a "war that never should have been authorized." But he often warns that simply changing parties in power is not enough to change the politics in Washington.

"Our government has to reflect our deepest values, and our deepest values involve not just thinking about ourselves but thinking about other people," he says. "If there are poor people in Cass County, it impoverishes us all. That idea that I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper, that we're looking after our seniors, our children, our disabled, the vulnerable—that notion has to be reflected

not just in our religious institutions, not just in church. It has to express itself through our government. We're all in this together. We rise and fall together. We're not just on our own."

With almost identical language during the same week in Iowa, Edwards and Clinton talked about "shared prosperity" and the need to recognize "we're in this together" instead of thinking that "you're on your own"—political framing terms promoted by the progressive think tank, the Economic Policy Institute.

Bold is better

Yet much as the candidates have converged in rhetoric and some policies, they have staked out differences. Clinton, who hews to an establishment foreign policy view to make herself appear tough, tries to paint Obama's modest but laudable candor and openness on foreign policy as naive. Obama counters that judgment is more important than experience. "Nobody has a longer resume than Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld," he says, "and that hasn't worked out so well."

Both Obama and Clinton have talked about bringing all interested parties to the table to create universal health insurance. But Obama, who like Edwards distinguishes himself from Clinton by refusing contributions from political action committees and Washington lobbyists, also says, "I don't mind insurance and drug companies having a seat at the table. I just don't want them buying all the chairs."

And Edwards, in a pointed critique of Obama, Clinton and "corporate Democrats," argues that it's necessary "to take the power away" from "entrenched powers," not invite them to make a deal on health care, energy or other major problems. At a UAW hall in Ottumwa, Iowa, Edwards said, "The idea that you can cooperate and negotiate with these people and give them a seat at the table is a fantasy." Instead, he said he'd announce his health care plans from the White House lawn, then warn Americans how corporations would attack his proposals. "We can't be cute about this," he said. "We've got to take these people head on."

That criticism strikes at the fault line between the progressive Obama, willing as he often suggests to mobilize popular pressure to bring change, and the post-partisan Obama, intent on bringing everyone together to resolve issues without political conflict.

After years of enduring Bush and the Republican right, "most Democrats are not in any bipartisan unity mindset," says one veteran Iowa political strategist, who is advising another campaign. "They need some red meat."

Progressive Democrats in particular want a presidential candidate who will take advantage of the recent leftward shift in public opinion. Obama appeals to the

Many Obama admirers do not view him as a progressive or a champion for the downtrodden. They see him instead as a plain-speaking, new force for change who reaches out to everyone.

party's left: He edged out Edwards in a straw poll of participants in a June conference organized by Campaign for America's Future (CAF), a D.C.-based group that mobilizes progressives within Democratic politics, and he and Edwards were virtually tied in an early summer survey of supporters of Democracy for America, a national group that grew out of Howard Dean's campaign four years ago.

But Robert Borosage, co-director of CAF, says Obama has "run a very cautious campaign and chosen to make himself the voice of responsible centrism." With his timidity on issues such as health care, energy and trade, Borosage says, "he's almost Hillaryesque in his caution on positions he's taken. You have to take a lot on faith that he's carrying a progressive banner, but he hasn't been around long enough to know where he'll come down. He's stirred a lot of excitement among young people and people not much engaged in politics, but other progressives have increasing questions about where he is: Is he the new triangulator or one of us?"

William McNary, president of USAction, a national network of statewide progressive citizen groups, personally—but not organizationally—supports Obama as a "genuine progressive" who will "expand the boundaries of American democracy," and heal the rupture with the rest of the world Bush caused with the war in Iraq. But even McNary, who has long known and worked with Obama, says, "If I had to offer any criticism, he's a bit cautious for my taste. People have to see someone who is putting forth bold proposals, not weak, timid programs. Bolder can be better."

In Iowa, where Edwards remains the frontrunner, some polls show Obama gaining strength. State Senator Joe Bolkcom, a lead organizer for the Working Families Win mobilization project of Americans for Democratic Action, sees Obama as inspiring young people much like Howard Dean did four years ago. "One of his main messages is the corruption of special interest money in politics

and how that distorts what the country needs now," Bolkcom says. "That's a message that's strong here, and that was one of Gov. Dean's messages."

And John Norris, the field organizer for Sen. John Kerry's upset victory in the 2004 Iowa caucus, contends that older, more experienced Democrats are now joining young Obama supporters, and that Obama has more of an opportunity to grow his support than the more established candidates. "Is he progressive?" Norris says. "In my mind, yes. Ideology is important to me. I don't know there's a great deal of distinction among top candidates, though I think Obama is more progressive than Hillary, who's moved to the right." But Norris also supports Obama because he has the "capacity, insight and approach to re-establish our ties with the world community" and the "enormous capacity to excite a new generation about public service."

"He fundamentally understands that we have to change the way we do politics in Washington," says Norris. "I think everyone else is cynical that we can make a fundamental change. I think you have to start with that fundamental belief or you can't get anything done. He's lived that as a community organizer, working for change from the democratic roots. If you're going to change Washington, it has to start in the countryside."

Can Obama resolve the tension between his post-partisan and progressive personas, and the differing camps of voters they attract? Unless he does, he may not have the opportunity to win the presidency, much less fundamentally change American politics. ■



A worker inspects bales of tobacco at one of Zimbabwe's tobacco auction floors in April.

DESMOND KWANDE/AP/GETTY IMAGES

Tobacco Stains

The global footprint of a deadly crop

BY BRYAN FARRELL

THE PAST DECADE HAS seen a remarkable shift in the way Americans view cigarette smoking. Since the massive tobacco litigation settlements began in 1997, the federal government has phased out support for tobacco farming, states and cities have enacted public smoking restrictions, and the number of smokers has steadily declined.

Meanwhile, the tobacco industry's manipulative advertising tactics have become part of the cultural lexicon. In the 2005 big screen satire *Thank You For Smoking*, the film's protagonist—a “morally flexible” tobacco lobbyist—admits, “I earn a living fronting an organization that kills 1,200 people a day.”

With Hollywood now taking jabs at its one-time co-conspirator, it's no wonder that the Centers for Disease Control found that 70 percent of the current 45 million

adult smokers in the United States want to quit. While slightly less than half will succeed, the mere desire offers hope that cigarette smoking in America could one-day go the way of trans-fats or MSG.

Such logic, however, does not extend to the tobacco manufacturers themselves. The multinational tobacco corporations have moved their production and marketing efforts overseas, causing experts to predict that by 2010, 87 percent of the world's tobacco will be grown in the developing world.

Since the '60s, global production has doubled and 33 million people work cultivating tobacco to serve the world's 1.2 billion smokers—one-fifth of the world's population. Meanwhile, according to conservative estimates by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, since 1997 consumption has increased at an annual rate of 1.7 percent in developing countries,

meaning people there will smoke 71 percent of the world's tobacco by 2010.

Deforestation and land erosion

Without even factoring in the paper wrapping, packaging and print advertisements—which require as much paper by weight as the tobacco being grown—nearly 600 million trees are felled each year to provide the fuel necessary for drying out the tobacco. That means one in eight trees cut down each year worldwide is being destroyed for tobacco production. In South Korea and Uruguay, tobacco-related deforestation accounts for more than 40 percent of the countries' total annual deforestation. While in Malawi, in a region where only three percent of the farmers grow tobacco, nearly 80 percent of the trees cut down each year are used for the curing process.

Such a rapid depletion of trees in an already semi-arid climate will lead to desertification. Parts of Uganda are currently losing much of their arable land as the topsoil erodes.

Yet farmers in developing countries continue to grow tobacco because of the tremendous financial incentives from multinational corporations like Philip Morris and RJ Reynolds. With enticements such as farming supplies or a guaranteed foreign exchange for their crops, farmers are reluctant to use their land for anything else.

Even when some corporations try to boost their green reputation by offering to replant trees on excess farmland, most tobacco farmers use what little land is left to grow food for their families. Moreover, were farmers to stop growing tobacco and only grow food crops—as the Yale University School of Medicine proposed more than a decade ago—10 to 20 million of the world's current 28 million undernourished people could be fed.

Aside from land erosion, deforestation also affects the atmosphere, by raising the level of carbon dioxide emissions responsible for global warming. Scientists affiliated with the climate research group Global Canopy Programme in England have reported that the 51 million acres cut down every year account for nearly 25 percent of heat-trapping gases. By that standard, the

9 million acres being deforested annually for tobacco production account for nearly 5 percent of greenhouse gas emissions.

Deadly litter

In the United Kingdom, people throw away 200 million butts and 20 million cigarette packages every day, some of which end up on the street. According to the Tidy Britain Group, cigarette butts make up nearly 40 percent of litter.

Since the filters found in most cigarettes are comprised of 12,000 plastic fibers, they are not biodegradable and can take up to 15 years to break down. Meanwhile, the leftover tobacco releases toxins into the surrounding environment.

According to Californians Against Waste, cleanup of cigarette litter costs taxpayers billions of dollars each year. Even more costly are the losses incurred from fires started by carelessly discarded cigarettes. Not only are they a major cause of forest fires—destroying wildlife and ecosystems—but they are the leading cause of fatal fires in the United States, killing more than a thousand people annually. The tobacco industry is fully capable of selling fire-safe cigarettes—wrapped with several thin bands of less-porous paper that act as “speed-bumps” to slow down a burning cigarette—but it only does so when forced by a state government. So far, only four states have such a mandate in place.

Poisoning the developing world

The deadly impact of cigarettes as post-consumer waste is one side of the story. Before being rolled and packaged, the tobacco leaf subjects humans and wildlife to numerous health hazards.

Since it is a particularly sensitive plant, tobacco often requires 16 applications of pesticides during the three-month growing period. In developing countries, where environmental laws are absent or not enforced, chemicals like DDT and dieldrin—both banned in the United States—are sprayed on the tobacco.

These pesticide applications often harm animals that live or feed near them, causing loss of biodiversity or genetic mutations. And runoff and leaching during a rainstorm carry the pesticides into waterways and aquifers, thereby contaminating the drinking supply.

Since tobacco farming requires an estimated 3,000 hours of work per year per

hectare—astonishing when compared to the 265 hours needed to produce maize—field workers endure long hours of exposure to these harmful pesticides. To make matters worse, most farm workers are in subtropical climates, where an extra layer of clothing—even if it’s for protection—could result in heatstroke. It’s no wonder

Nearly 600 million trees are felled each year to provide the fuel necessary for drying tobacco. That means one out of every eight trees cut down is being destroyed for tobacco production.

that pesticide poisoning is almost exclusively a problem in the developing world, where an estimated 25 million poisonings occur each year.

Popular pesticides used on tobacco crops, such as acephate, cause twitching, headaches, salivation, diarrhea, difficulty breathing and death. A study conducted by the University of Rio Grande do Sul, one of Brazil’s largest federal universities, found that the suicide rate among Brazilian tobacco workers between 1979 and 1995 was nearly seven times greater than the national rate. They also discovered that the occurrence of these suicides corresponded with pesticide sprayings, harvests and preparation for the next year’s crop (the study admitted that its findings were not conclusive, as workers’ depression might also stem from their often insurmountable debt).

Even without pesticides, farm workers are getting sick from the nicotine their skin absorbs while handling wet leaves. This condition has come to be known as green tobacco sickness (GTS) and its symptoms include nausea, weakness, abdominal cramps, and changes in blood pressure and heart rates. While it’s hard to estimate the number of people suffering from GTS, one study conducted on migrant workers in North Carolina suggests that 41 percent of tobacco handlers get the illness at least once during harvest season.

Exposure to the plant and its chemicals pose a greater threat to children, increasing the risk of cancer as well as damage to their immune and nervous systems. No figures exist on the number of child tobacco workers worldwide, but many tobacco-growing countries have a history of child labor.

The Norway-based Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research is one of the only organizations in the world to investigate tobacco-production. After researching the use of child labor on African tobacco estates—which are strikingly feudal—Fafo found that 78 percent of the children of tobacco workers between

the ages of 10 and 14 work either full or part time with their parents, performing all the tasks of tobacco cultivation.

Solving the crisis

The looting of natural resources, the destruction of ecosystems, and the poisoning and enslavement of people are all reasons to end our dependence on a product that is completely unnecessary to humans. Economic alternatives to tobacco production need to be encouraged, with the goal of eradicating tobacco as a cash crop.

According to the London-based Panos Institute, which specializes in development issues, “Many crops can grow in land that is now under tobacco—they include the majority of grain crops and vegetables. Sugar cane, bananas, coconut, pineapples and cotton could all be suitable.”

Since 1999, the Golden Leaf Foundation has used funds from the settlement with cigarette manufacturers to help farmers in North Carolina transition from a tobacco-dependent economy to alternative programs like goat farming. In this respect, other parts of the world could follow America’s lead.

The fight against tobacco consumption can be won with awareness and education. The industry has suffered a massive blow to its U.S. propaganda machine. Such attacks must continue throughout the world until smoking is not just looked upon as a poor personal health decision, but one that has deadly implications for all the world’s inhabitants. ■

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An Unholy Alliance

Across the Deep South, religion, culture and politics collide to make 'abortion' a dirty word

BY CARRIE KILMAN

EVERY WEDNESDAY AND FRIDAY morning, two or three volunteers wearing bright green shirts that read "Pro-Choice, Y'all" assemble in front of Reproductive Health Services in Montgomery, Ala., to escort patients from the parking lot to the front door, past a small sea of anti-abortion protesters.

The protesters carry handmade signs and pictures of fetuses sucking their thumbs. They play violins and blow loudly into horns. They thrust graphic pamphlets at the patients, form prayer circles on the sidewalk, and teach their children to plead with women to not murder their babies. The protesters are mostly women. They look like Sunday school teachers, housewives and hip grandmas. And, during the past few months, they have grown more vocal and more organized, emboldened by the recent closure of the only clinic in Mobile.

Every state in the Deep South—Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina—restricts low-income women's access to abortion. Most ban abortion after 12 weeks of pregnancy. None explicitly protect health care facilities from harassment or violence. All have mandatory delay laws that unfairly burden women who have limited access to transportation and time off work, and Louisiana and South Carolina both passed unconstitutional laws requiring a husband's consent for a married woman's abortion. In the past 16 months, two abortion clinics in Alabama have closed, and new regulations are making it difficult for other clinics to stay open. Now, anti-abortion groups are strategizing ways to outlaw birth control and eliminate sex education.

Michelle Colon, president of the National Organization for Women's (NOW) Mid-South region (Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee) calls it a "war on women"—the gravity of which citizens in more progressive parts



of the country don't appreciate. "The rest of the country kind of writes off the South—people feel the battle has been lost here," Colon says.

Colon is part of a vocal, scrappy cadre of grassroots activists challenging the well-funded, entrenched anti-abortion movement that has long dominated state legislatures and local pulpits across the region. One Southern feminist put it this way: "Women here are sick and tired of being sick and tired."

"It's not legal, is it?"

Every morning when June Ayers arrives for work, she scans the parking lot for suspicious people and packages before getting out of her car. Ayers owns Reproduc-

tive Health Services, one of seven clinics that provide abortions in Alabama. She's been followed home, trailed at the mall and harassed on her front porch.

Ayers was close friends with David Gunn, a doctor who performed abortions at clinics throughout Alabama and Florida. Anti-abortion protesters plastered Gunn's face and home phone number to "Wanted" posters and distributed them at rallies. He answered their harassment by blasting Tom Petty's "I Won't Back Down", singing along, and wagging his finger in their direction. In March 1993, Gunn died when a protester shot him three times in the back outside of his clinic in Pensacola, Fla. The doctor on Ayers' staff now wears a bulletproof vest.

Ayers recently invested in a sprinkler system to keep the protesters at bay. She has also installed concrete stepping-stones across the lawn so patients and escorts can avoid the protesters crowding the sidewalk. She bought orange vests for the escorts, so startled patients can distinguish between protesters and volunteers.

"At least once a month, I have women who call me and ask whether abortion is legal. That type of misinformation is rampant," says Ayers. "We're in the middle of the Bible Belt. It's not just religion, it's the fanatical religious aspect that keeps stirring people up who are opposed to us."

It's a place where the Christian Coalition holds sway over politicians, and many people vote the way they're told in church. The legislative climate is "very hostile" toward abortion, says Felicia Brown Williams, who oversees Planned Parenthood's advocacy agenda in Mississippi, one of two states with only one abortion clinic.

Mississippi has passed so many laws governing what abortion clinics can and cannot do that it is virtually impossible to open a second clinic without breaking state law. Mississippi requires permission from both parents for women under 18, except in cases of incest. The state's conscience clause allows pharmacists to refuse to fill prescriptions for birth control. And earlier this year the Mississippi legislature passed a "trigger law," immediately making abortion illegal should *Roe v. Wade* be overturned.

From 'pro choice' to 'reproductive justice'

In the early-1990s, researcher Loretta Ross noticed the anti-abortion movement was borrowing tactics from the Ku Klux Klan—things like "Wanted" posters and targeted bombings. Ross now directs SisterSong, a national reproductive health collective in Atlanta. She travels the country, encouraging groups like Planned Parenthood to adopt a philosophy that SisterSong terms "reproductive justice."

"Stopping at the right to terminate a pregnancy is woefully inadequate when it comes to the realities of people of color," Ross says. "We have to fight for three different dimensions of the struggle: We join our pro-choice sisters to fight for the right not to have a child; but as women of color, we have been subjected to various strategies of population control, like forced sterilization, so we also have to fight for the

right to *have* a child, especially in the context of people accusing us of having babies to get on welfare or to stay in the country. And we have to fight for the right to parent the children we already have, thanks to a criminal justice system that's trying to capture them earlier and earlier."

Moving from "pro-choice" to "reproductive justice" may prove crucial in the Deep South—home to a fast-growing Latino

'Most of the time, women think they actually deserve the ridicule and harassment from the street protestors. It's self-punishment: "I deserve to be accosted, because this is my choice."'

population—and towns like Montgomery, Ala., which is about 50 percent black.

"There is an unholy alliance between the legislators who oppose civil rights and the legislators who oppose reproductive rights," Ross says. "As long as we look at reproductive rights only as the politics of gender, we will be missing the guiding script."

Each year, Operation Save America (OSA) targets different clinics across the United States. Last summer, the group traveled to Jackson, Miss., for a weeklong "siege" to temporarily shut down the state's only abortion clinic. OSA members, who compare themselves to Martin Luther King Jr., liken abortion to black genocide and lynching. While the anti-abortion movement has made inroads with some black churches, OSA's references to lynching and Rev. King went too far.

Jackson's abortion rights community mobilized to protect the last clinic in Mississippi. With volunteers coming from as far as Canada, they organized a door-knocking campaign, traversing Jackson's communities of color and poor white communities, educating residents about OSA.

Abortion rights supporters from across the South flooded Jackson that week, in a series of counter-rallies and speak-outs called Reproductive Freedom Summer. OSA's tactics—burning a Gay Pride flag and pages of the Koran, and picketing two Christian churches—created a local uproar. The clinic stayed open.

So goes the nation

Other states, like New York or Wisconsin, have achieved a kind of equilibrium, with a mass of vocal supporters on both sides. Outside of cities like Atlanta, this isn't true of the Deep South.

"People are afraid to be seen at pro-choice events for fear of losing their jobs, or being rejected from church, or their kids being ostracized at school," says Colon, of Mid-South NOW. In some places in the South, abortion is referred to as the "A word"; and many women, upon arriving for an abortion, tell clinic staff they think abortion is wrong.

"Most of the time, women think they

actually deserve the ridicule and harassment from the street protestors," says Ayers, from the Montgomery clinic. "It's self-punishment: 'I deserve to be accosted, because this is the choice I'm making.'"

Last year, Deirdra Harris Glover realized her silence implied tacit approval of Mississippi's proposed abortion ban. So Glover, an admitted "professional geek," launched ProChoiceMississippi.org to encourage closeted abortion rights supporters to come out. "Shame is an incredibly dehumanizing tactic used by the anti-abortion movement," Glover wrote in an email. "They've managed to paint abortion as too awful to ever be dragged into the light of day."

The Deep South's reproductive rights community has few political allies. In Mississippi and Louisiana, Democrats run on anti-choice platforms. "We don't have any judges on our side. We don't have many in the media on our side," says Colon. "The pro-choice allies in the state legislature are the older black men. The women in the legislature sell us out every time."

And yet thinking that anti-choice zealotry is only an issue south of the Mason-Dixon line is a mistake. Laws restricting women's access to healthcare have chipped away at abortion rights in almost every state. In fact, only seven states have laws protecting the right to an abortion.

"In some ways, the South is behind; but in some ways, the South is dictating the rest of the country," says Ross, of SisterSong. "There wouldn't be a resurgent right-wing if the rest of the country wasn't becoming Dixie-fied."

Colon adds: "If we lose the South, the middle of the country won't be long." ■

BY CHELSEA ROSS

A Campaign of One's Own

Connie Schultz is a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist at the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, an outspoken feminist and humanist, the mother of two children and two stepchildren, and the wife of Ohio's junior senator Sherrod Brown. It's this last title that she grapples with in her

recent book ... *and His Lovely Wife: A Memoir From the Woman Beside the Man*, in which she recounts her experience on her lovely husband's campaign trail.

What you won't find in her bio is that, at 50, Schultz embraces her age with a youthful vibrancy, and while she is commanding, she is also warm and boasts a deep, full laugh.

Two days before her son's wedding, Schultz spoke with *In These Times* over the phone about, among other things, growing up a member of the working-class in Ashtabula, Ohio, her love for the late Grace Paley, and why it bothers her that women can be so catty.

In a recent column, you remembered Grace Paley, who was incidentally a long-time *In These Times* subscriber and donor. You wrote that her writing helped you realize the "universal language" of class.

Paley was this New York Jewish writer, writing about New York Jewish women. When I read her as a teenager, I realized that the women around me had way more in common with the women in Paley's stories than with the [wealthier] women across the river. If you are growing up and don't have the privileges afforded to others, your life could turn out very differently simply because of that.

A couple of years ago, an editor who was frustrated with some of my writing said to me, "Connie, you are not working class. You are an intellectual." And I looked at him and I said, "Well, if that's true, then I'm an intellectual from the working class. We

have smart people too."

I realized then, wow, this consciousness that I have, it has never left me. Had I not had the chance to go to college, I could still be living and working in Ashtabula, perhaps in one of the jobs that one of my relatives has. I don't see how I could be advocating any other way. As I say all the time, "The privileged already have their advocates, they don't need me!"

John Edwards has been getting a lot of similar flack recently—advocating for the working class from the cushion of his big house and bank account.

A part of you, no matter where you're at, always feels more comfortable with folks who are from where you're from. There are times when I can feel like, 'Wow, I am so out of my element.' Not only because I don't have what a lot of these people want, but I don't ever want it. We're always going to speak a different language to a certain extent.

You have criticized female journalists for attacking other women. In one recent column you wrote, "A male reporter gleefully lobbed this hand grenade recently: 'You can stop worrying about us guys undermining your gender. ... You ladies are doing a fine job of it all by yourselves.'"

Some women have said, "You know, you're trying to hold us to a higher standard than male journalists." Well, yeah, but that's not going to be much of a reach. We should uphold a higher standard because it took us a long time to get these positions of power

and I don't want us to waste them, especially by undermining other women.

That doesn't mean we don't criticize women on policy, it means that we elevate the level of conversation. We don't make it about cleavage. We don't make it about this horrible notion of a trophy wife.

This whole Hillary Clinton cleavage thing was just ridiculous. I wrote in my column that if when I turn 60, anybody is talking about my cleavage, I'll throw a party and wear a granny thong! (Laughs). And Robin Givhan [of the *Washington Post*] is not absolved because she's a fashion writer. I will not accept that.

I find that it's not just in journalism, but all areas of life. Women seem to be most competitive with each other, even when mutual support would be more advantageous. Maybe it's exactly because we have to work so much harder to get where we want to go.

It's disheartening to hear you say that because you're so much younger than me, but I know it's true. We absolutely have to carry as we climb. As I often say to audiences of women my age and older when I'm asked what we could be doing to help young women, "Look, we don't have their midriff, they don't have our wisdom."

You put your career on hold to join your husband on the 2006 Senate campaign trail. You write in ... *and His Lovely Wife* how that was a difficult decision. How did it feel getting back to the column?

It's so nice to see things happening in the news and not feel that constant frustration I felt during the campaign of not being able to weigh in on them. That was so hard sometimes. But I'm not complaining. My editor at Random House has a great motto: "No whining on the yacht."

You touch on a lot of personal issues in your column, but in the book you seemed to take it to another level. Was that a conscious decision?



Connie Schultz: 'The privileged already have their advocates. They don't need me.'

It needed to be open and personal. I wanted an honest book because I was trying to make the point that this is hard, but it's still worth doing. I want to encourage other women to be involved in politics. I'm not gonna run for office. I'm a journalist, that's what I'm meant to do. But I also know that when more women are elected, we have more legislation on family issues, on healthcare, on education. We need more women in elected bodies.

I was going to wait till the end of the interview to ask you this, but since we're already on the topic of women in politics, are you endorsing Hillary?

I am.

I'm asked that a lot. I've waited a long time for this moment in history. Do I think she's a perfect candidate? No. But here's the thing: I've been voting since I was 18, and I've voted for an awful lot of men, none of them were perfect. Some of them were real bozos, but they were the best that was offered. I don't need Hillary to be perfect. I have a lot of confidence in her and lot of faith in her ability to lead this country. When I watch her at debates, she is the smartest person in the room. She's the most experienced person in the room. Does that mean that I don't think Obama or Edwards are viable candidates? Of course not. We're

talking about an abundance of riches for the Democrats. But I'm there with Hillary.

Is there anything that concerns you about her?

I wish her vote had been different on the war, of course. But I like how she's growing as a candidate. And I do like her personally. I don't know her well, but I trust her.

In the July issue of *The Nation*, Lakshmi Chaudhry looked at why so many women have an issue with Hillary, and she wrote, "Let's be clear: Hillary has a 'feminist problem,' and more so with those who lean left."

What do they want from her? How can she be what they all want and still get elected? I know she's a feminist. On election night, she called Sherrod and congratulated him, and you know what she said? "Tell Connie not to let anyone tell her that she can't do this anymore." That is a feminist. And that is somebody who really knew my deepest fear without my ever having to say it to her.

Do you find your job affects you socially when you're in Washington?

Only in Washington, my dear, only in Washington. (Laughs). Anywhere else in the country, I am first and foremost a columnist

and book author. In Washington, I am first and foremost a senator's wife. Which is why I'm talking to you from Cleveland.

Do you have anything to say about the recent exodus of White House staffers?

Hallelujah! The happy feet dance you're hearing is mine.

The damage that this administration has done to this country is just unreal. But I'm optimistic. And one reason is the increasing involvement of women, especially older women, in politics and at the grassroots level.

If there is a silver lining to this administration it is that it has gotten people engaged and involved again. Outrage is a very powerful motivating force. My mom is a perfect example.

Women at my age in this culture, we are supposed to become invisible because we're no longer young. Well, the hell with that. Older women all over the country are saying, "I will be heard."

It always makes me think of that quote by Maggie Kuhn, founder of the Gray Panthers, "Speak your mind even if your voice shakes." I say this quote and see women tear up because too often we're so afraid of how we'll sound, instead of just being heard.

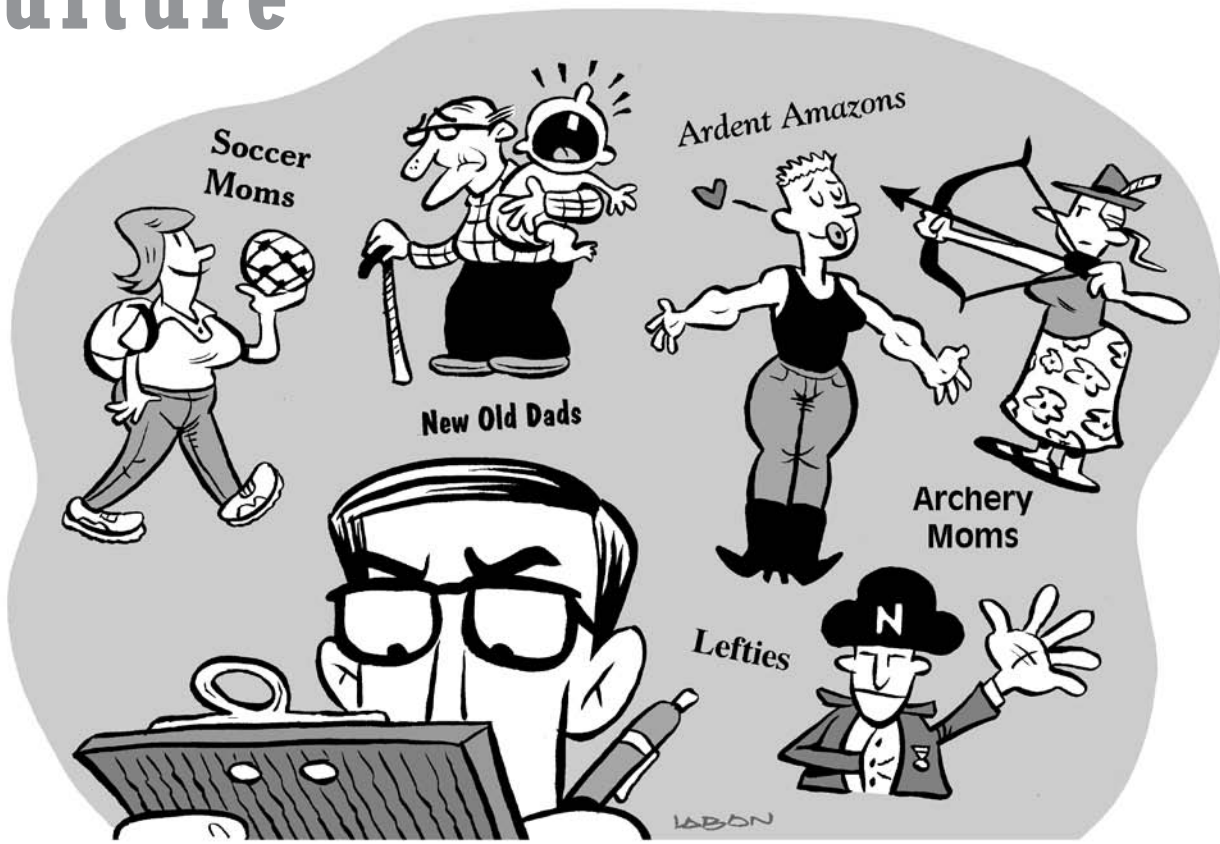
You are known for lending a certain humor to very serious issues. It seems like it comes naturally, does it?

Well, here's how it works. My boss, the best editor I've ever had, says, "When you're the most angry, you should be your most funny." Nobody wants to hear blind rage. If you can laugh at yourself, or can get people to laugh along with you, you'll make them hear the message without them even realizing it.

I have to ask. In the book you wrote that you were the last person in the world who wanted Sherrod to run for Senate. How would you feel about being the wife of a presidential candidate?

I'm going to come to Chicago and wrestle you to the ground now. (Laughs.) Uh, no. I would not want to be the wife of a presidential candidate.

Sherrod has said he's not running. Sherrod says—oh, I feel like a campaign wife again with all this "Sherrod says"—but Sherrod says you can't be a great senator if you always have one eye on the White House. He wants to be a great senator, and I support him wholeheartedly in that endeavor. ■



Trending Toward Inanity

BY EZRA KLEIN

If you wanted to ruin the political career of Mark Penn, Hillary Clinton's chief pollster and strategist, here would be one way to do it: First, create some sort of artifact bearing his name that you could use to tank his reputation. A book

would do perfectly. Title it something buzz-wordy and superficial, like *Microtrends*, though perhaps that's too heavy-handed. Fill it with vapid koans, like "small is the new big" and "the biggest movements in America today are small." To make it seem authentic, you'd want to ape Penn's long-standing affection for combining demographic salami-slicing with cutesy-naming (this is the man who foisted "Soccer Moms" upon our weary lexicon), making each short chapter an exposition of ever-more absurd groups—think "Archery Moms," "Old New Dads," and "Ardent Amazons." Finally, assert their importance through wild and empirically unsupported speculations. That last would be the key: You'd want the methodology so wild and slipshod, so transparently flawed, that no one would trust the analyst ever again.

Astonishingly, Penn himself has done exactly this.

His new book *Microtrends* is so bad that the question—in a fair world—isn't whether it will destroy his own reputation, but whether it is so epically awful as to take the entire polling industry down with it.

First, a bit of full disclosure: Unlike everybody else in Washington, I have never met Mark Penn. This, I am assured, is to my enduring discredit, as he's apparently a lovely individual, and if I only knew him, I would understand that his protection of a union-busting division within Burson-Marsteller, the PR firm of which he is the CEO, isn't evidence of anti-union feelings at all. Nor is Penn's ceaseless advocacy for a cautious, hawkish, pro-corporate, don't-rock-the-boat Democratic Party a function of his beliefs, corporate background or clients. Instead, it's merely "The Numbers." Indeed, nothing Penn says or does can be questioned, because he's just there to give us The Numbers.

His personal thoughts are immaterial.

At the same time, his personal thoughts matter. As the *Washington Post* recently reported: “In the four months since Clinton officially became a candidate, Penn has consolidated his power, according to advisers close to the campaign, taking increasing control of the operation. Armed with voluminous data that he collects through his private polling firm, Penn has become involved in virtually every move Clinton makes, with the result that the campaign reflects the chief strategist as much as the candidate.” Even there, though, the Penn mystique persists: Penn’s power, we’re told, comes from his “voluminous data,” not his opinions. To argue with Penn is to argue with The Numbers. And you’re not against Numbers, are you?

That’s the Penn defense, and he and his friends have long stuck to it. “Mark is somebody who is very, very comfortable with quantification,” enthused Doug Schoen, his polling partner of over 30 years. “He is very comfortable with numbers.” It is this reputation that, so far as I can tell, Mark Penn has written *Microtrends* to dispel. Unlike most pollsters, Penn never releases his raw numbers, only his analysis. So we must take it on faith that his methodology is rigorous, his polls accurate and his interpretations fair. This book is our first opportunity to observe, at length, how adroitly Penn handles raw data. And the answer is stunning, even to a doubter like me. Mark Penn cannot handle numbers. If this book were turned in as the final to an entry-level statistics class, Penn would not only be failed, but the professor might well retire in shame.

I first flipped through *Microtrends* while at the YearlyKos convention, and Penn, astonishingly, seemed to comprehend the importance of the loosely connected, grassroots-driven, progressive movement’s flowering. “I suspect the lefty boom will bring a surge in the promotion of sheer creative energy,” Penn writes, “driven by an idea that is at the heart of this book—that small groups of people, sharing common experiences, can increasingly be drawn together to rally for their interests.” I was shocked—Penn was speaking admirably of “lefties,” not trying to recast them as moderates, not trying to write them out of the party? He was endorsing open-source poli-

tics, rather than a top-down structure? I had misjudged the man!

I read on. Penn was talking about *actual* lefties—people who are born left-handed. Increasingly grim, I absorbed the first hard blows of Penn’s interpretative technique: “More lefties,” he enthuses, “could mean more military innovation: Famous

a fallacy atop an error built around *something that isn’t happening*.

This isn’t an isolated example. In a chapter called “Aspiring Snipers,” Penn explains, “It’s the rare moment when a poll stops me in my tracks and reorients my understanding of things.” One such poll was conducted last fall, when Bendixen and Associates

Mark Penn’s *Microtrends* is so bad that the question—in a fair world—shouldn’t be whether it will destroy his reputation, but whether it will take the entire polling industry down with it.

military leaders from Charlemagne to Alexander the Great to Julius Caesar to Napoleon—as well as Colin Powell and Norman Schwarzkopf—were left-handed.” He uses the same thunderingly awful logic to argue that we’ll see more art and music greats, more famous criminals, more great comedians, more “executive greatness,” and better tennis and basketball players.

This is what statisticians—or anyone who has taken a statistics class—call a “correlation/causation error.” It is not enough to cherry-pick a couple famed military leaders, notice that they’re lefties and assume that something intrinsic to their handedness caused their tactical genius. It is not enough to say that past cultures discouraged left-handedness and use that as a stand-in for discouraging creativity of all sorts. To say that Bill Gates is right-handed does not suggest that a greater proportion of right-handed people would mean more Bill Gateses. For a professional pollster to imply that correlation equals causation is like a firefighter trying to put out flames by tossing a toaster into the blaze—it bespeaks a complete unfamiliarity with the relevant techniques.

What’s more amazing is this: A page earlier, Penn argues that the rise in lefties has nothing to do with there being more lefties, and everything to do with more permissive parenting. In other words, where children used to be trained out of left-handedness, now parents “shrug their shoulders, saying it’s okay.” So not only does Penn fail to prove that lefties are genetically different in some important way, he also suggests that the gene pool is no different, and that there are as many of them around now as always. It’s

asked 601 young Californians what they’d be doing in 10 years. About 1 percent—so, a handful—said they’d be snipers. Certainly, that’s an odd reply. But Penn never mentions that the Bendixen poll had a margin of error of plus-or-minus 4 percent—four being a larger number than one. Additionally, it’s meaningless without further study. Anyone in the age bracket would attribute it to video games, or snipers being, let’s admit it, quite cool. Yet Penn, based on no follow-up interviews, detects a “new patriotism,” and a desire “to master complex mathematical formulas like how distance or wind might affect the path of the bullet.” This simply isn’t professional work. (It is bitter, though. Penn concludes the chapter by complaining, “Ask anyone in politics and they will agree—they face ‘snipers’ every day who are trying to find one flinch, one out-of-place word to put on Drudge or YouTube.” It takes a special sort of self-regard to compare the danger of being embedded on YouTube to being hunted down in urban warfare.)

Elsewhere, Penn conflates one poll on attitudes toward the religion of Islam with attitudes toward American Muslims. At times, he mixes percentages and absolute values for scare effect, as when he darkly warns that if one-tenth of one percent of our population—300,000 people—turned to al Qaeda, it would be “more than enough to destabilize our society.” Sometimes he just discards data, as when he conveniently decides to ignore his evidence that churchgoers reject female ministers and speculates that “consensus and compassion may be on the outs right now, but they are bound to make a comeback,” which is all the argument he needs to say

“we are also ready for the first female Billy Graham.” And on, and on.

All this is in service of his concept that “microtrends” now govern our world: “It takes 1 percent of people making a dedicated choice—contrary to the mainstream’s choice—to create a movement that can change the world,” Penn writes. Why 1 percent? Who knows? Penn doesn’t stick to it himself. Sometimes, it’s one-tenth of one percent, as in his al Qaeda example, or 10 percent, as with lefties, or sometimes it’s the microtrend of—I kid you not—the tens of millions of Americans who moved to the suburbs in the 20th century. Toward the book’s end, Penn says the “magic of the 1 percent threshold” is that “ten people with bazookas can overcome 1,000 people with picket signs, but they can’t overcome 10,000 people with picket signs.” Chew on that one, grasshopper.

As microchapter after microchapter passed, reviewing this book began to feel like dropping a grenade into a barrel of fish. But *Microtrends* is illuminating. Pollsters occupy a uniquely powerful space in American political discourse: They bring science to elections. Armed with heaps of raw data, they elevate their opinions into something altogether weightier: Conclusions. When an organization sends out a press release saying the organization is right, it’s ignored. When a pollster sends out a poll showing the electorate agrees, ears in Washington perk up.

The enterprise has always been dodgy. Populist pollsters reliably discover that the electorate thirsts for more populism. Conservative pollsters routinely discover a small government consensus pulsing at the heart of the body politic. When the libertarian Cato Institute commissioned a poll of the electorate, they found—shockingly—that the essential swing vote was made of libertarians. Remarkably, whenever a politician or self-interested institution releases a poll, the results show a symmetry between the attitudes of the pollster’s employer and those of the voters. But Penn’s book shines light on this phenomenon: If he is the pinnacle of his profession, then the profession uses numbers as a ruse—a superficial empiricism that obscures garden-variety hackery. And that’s a trend worth worrying about. ■

EZRA KLEIN is a staff writer at the American Prospect who blogs regularly at www.ezraklein.com



In a still from *Quilombo Country*, Hugo Souza and his daughter eat doughnuts for breakfast

FILM

Can Brazil’s Quilombos Survive?

By Anne Kogan

UNLIKE THE UNITED States, where slavery is too often relegated to the shadows of history, in Brazil the memory is still alive—especially in the *quilombos*, the encampment communities that escaped or freed African slaves founded in the country’s vast mountain ranges and deep jungles. Leonard Abrams’ documentary, *Quilombo Country*, examines the legacy of slavery that haunts the people who live there, explores the vibrant culture of these communities and chronicles the challenges they face in modern-day Brazil.

Quilombo Country opens with the frenetic beat of Tambor da Criola, a music native to the state of Maranhão. As women dance and turn, making their skirts swirl around them, the men drum and sing about traveling a long and difficult path. An older man in the village explains that slaves created this dance as a way to enjoy themselves while living an existence almost wholly defined by cruelty and misery.

Narrated by Chuck D of Public Enemy fame, *Quilombo Country* is divided into three sections, each focused on one *quilombo* community—Itipacura in the northeastern state of Maranhão; Marajó, an island at the mouth of the Amazon River, in the state of Belem; and Trombetas, in the Amazon. This parallels the

path of slavery in Brazil, which began in the 1550s under the Portuguese occupation in the northeast state of Bahia, before moving westward to the Amazon, when settlers realized that the land was ideal for growing sugarcane.

Initially, the Portuguese enslaved indigenous Brazilians. But when the natives began dying from European diseases and the demand for workers exceeded available numbers, the Portuguese looked to Africa.

Over the next three centuries, Brazil brought approximately 3.6 million people to work on sugarcane plantations—37 percent of all Africans sold into slavery. In one moving scene, a resident of Marajó tells how his grandfather was sold for a bottle of *cachaça* (sugarcane alcohol) and a crate of bananas. And though Princess Isabel officially abolished slavery in 1888, the practice continued unchecked in many parts of the country.

In 2004, Brazil admitted that at least 25,000 people are still working under slave-like conditions, and in July the government raided a sugarcane plantation in the Amazon, liberating more than 1,000 workers—the largest anti-slavery raid in recent history.

To counter the brutality of slavery, *quilombos* often acted as resistance groups, leading rebellions and plantation raids. Today, many residents view themselves as carrying on the fight against injustice by continuing to live in the *quilombos*, maintaining their traditions and fighting for their land rights. One young woman tells Abrams, “We no longer fight with knives ... but we are still fighting.”

Struggles over land ownership have led to a host of other problems. *Quilom-*

bo residents want their children to get an education, but cannot afford to send them to cities and refuse to leave their homes for fear of losing their land. Commercial farmers are taking land, often under fraudulent means, and companies often claim land in the rain forests without formal or legal opposition.

In addition, some residents have left the communities for city life. Abrams examines how the *quilombos* are split between those who follow the old ways and those who wish to integrate into mainstream Brazilian society. Most *quilombo* residents still live in mud houses, grow their own crops, hunt, fish and make their own instruments, but the loss of land and accompanying urban migration have put a strain on the communities. As residents come back to the *quilombos*, they bring with them television and new music, which some older residents view as undermining their cultural identity.

The documentary features outstanding footage of festivals, parties and religious ceremonies. Tambor da Criola, Bumba Meu Boi and Carimbó are among the

traditional music and dance forms practiced in the *quilombos* during slavery. *Macumba* and *pajé* are religions from the area which, along with festivals like those of Santa Filomena and São Benedito (also known as Festivals of the Mast), demonstrate the syncretic relationship between African animism, Catholicism and native Brazilian spiritualism, often by honoring Catholic saints alongside African deities with locally created rituals. This amalgamation of beliefs, similar to that found in Haiti and Cuba, permeates many aspects of Afro-Brazilian life today, particularly *quilombo* communities. As one *quilombo* resident says, "There is nothing sacred sacred and there is nothing profane profane."

Unfortunately, narrator Chuck D's punchy delivery of the script and mediocre pronunciation of the Portuguese words are an unwelcome distraction. *Quilombo Country* would benefit from commentary that ties together the challenges facing the regions featured in the three sections of the documentary.

Notably absent are the perspectives of

other Brazilians, elected officials or not, who could comment on the legal disputes and how the *quilombos* are viewed from within the government. Similarly, it would be good to hear from some of the nearby urban residents, who have assimilated many of the communities' traditions, talk about whether they support *quilombo* struggles for landownership.

Quilombo Country brings to light the concerns of a segment of Brazil society, which, though small, has greatly influenced Brazilian culture. The film makes it clear that the *quilombos*' fight for land rights and legal recognition is integral to saving a living culture from extinction. ■

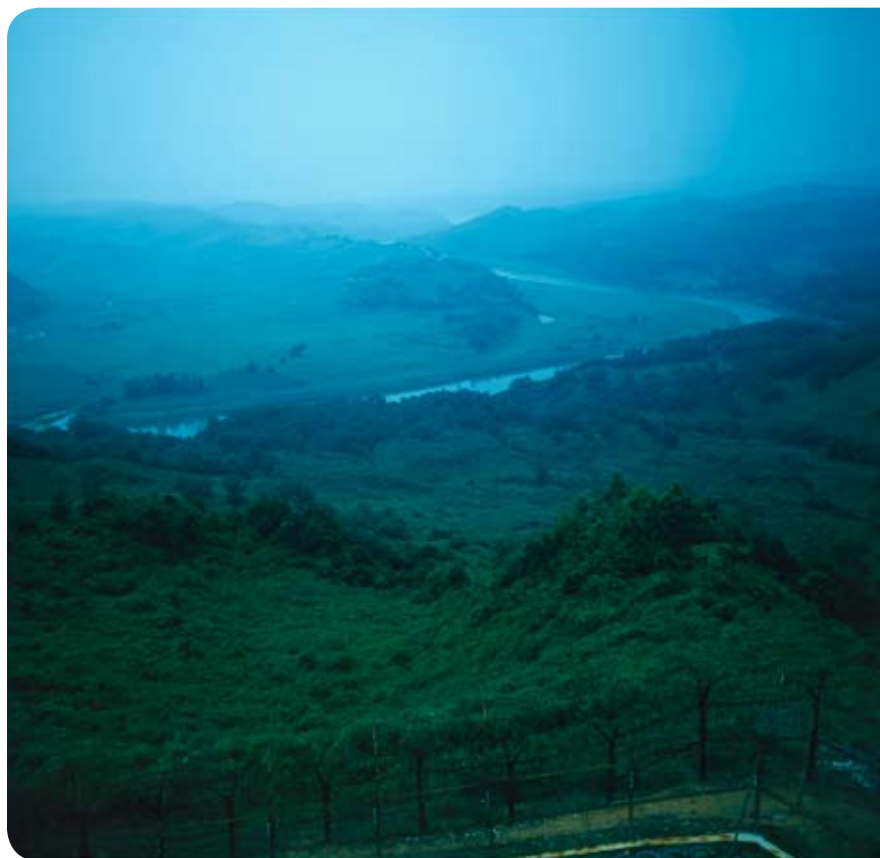
BOOKS

No Happy Endings

By Achy Obejas

THERE IS NO happy ending in *Jia* (Cleis Press), Hyejin Kim's grim novel about North Korea, no final scene of freedom, no hint about what

[art space]



LOADED LANDSCAPES

The images in *Loaded Landscapes*, the current exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College in Chicago, appear to be non-threatening, but each photograph is laden with meaning beyond its composition.

"The photographers seek politically charged sites with significant histories, yet their images offer little or no discernible evidence of either past events or current tension," says curator Natasha Egan.

Subjects range from Hitler's favorite mountain retreat to Atta Kim's ethereal photograph of the Demilitarized Zone dividing North and South Korea—the world's most heavily armed border (left). The exhibit runs through Oct. 13. For more information, visit: <http://mocp.org/>

—Chelsea Ross

might happen in a future without the Great Leader; there isn't even the usual scrap of hope that even the bleakest novels about survivors from totalitarian regimes frequently offer.

Based on stories Kim heard when working with North Korean refugees in China and told (mostly) in a first-person narrative from the point of view of the title character, a North Korean orphan who manages a comparatively privileged existence, *Jia* doesn't pretend to have documentary verisimilitude. What it does is paint a composite portrait with small, intimate strokes. This is a fast, oddly flat but hypnotic read, full of tiny but searing details about life in what is commonly regarded as the world's most secretive and most repressive regime. The almost mechanical tone of Kim's language avoids both sentimentality and sensationalism—though it comes close to tabloidish when the narrative becomes uncomfortably omniscient in telling the stories of a couple of Jia's friends. The story might have been better served by letting Jia herself tell them “as told to” her, which would also give the reader a bit of distance from some of the harrowing events.

What is most telling about Jia's journey from North Korea to just inside China, to a frontier town where the black market thrives on the traffic and needs of refugees, is that its impetus doesn't stem from either politics or economics. That is, she doesn't flee because of ideological disagreement with Kim Jong II—in fact, she remains remarkably respectful throughout—nor because of pressing material needs, the way her friend Gun feels pressured to ease the terrible existence of his elderly and sick parents. Jia leaves because of shame, shame provoked, yes, by the political circumstances created by the peculiar policies implemented by Kim Jong II, but whose roots go much deeper, to a caste system that involves very non-Marxist, non-utopian notions of family and honor.

In *Jia*, Kim never steps outside the narrative to editorialize about Kim Jong II. For the first half of the book, we experience the hallmarks of North Korean society with deftness and grace. The great famines of the '90s are referred to episodically, personally, as we watch Jia and her acquaintances struggle to find something to eat. But there's no desperation here; Jia and company



A girl whose family escaped from North Korea in 2003 looks out from a bus upon her arrival at Incheon International Airport outside Seoul.

approach their fates with a level kind of acceptance. There's a hardscrabble quality to survival in Kim's Pyongyang, where all good things are given to the people as gifts by the Great Leader and all bad things are the ripple effects of outside events. The utter lack of irony in the way Kim has Jia tell these things is devastating. The horror is that Kim's characters know no other life; they can envision nothing else.

When we first meet Jia, the daughter of a political prisoner, she's a little girl living in the provinces, near the labor camp where her father is incarcerated. An attempt to reunite with her other set of grandparents, who are politically connected and might save her from a dead-end existence, fails miserably because of the shame attached to her due to her father's status, and she's left an orphan in Pyongyang. From then on, Jia is the recipient of an amazing string of protectors—the mistress at the orphanage, the director at a national dance school, the director of entertainment at a tourist hotel that allows her contact with outsiders, tips in hard currency, and a Berlitz-like knowledge of English. The last of these protectors, a Korean-Chinese businessman who saves her from a certain life in prostitution, strains credulity with his timing and generosity of spirit.

Throughout her adolescence and adult life, Jia hides her pedigree in order not to alienate her friends, and most importantly, her boyfriend, Seunggyu, an eager soldier for his nation, convinced of Kim Jong II's vision of North Korea as

the happiest, best place on earth. What Jia sees in him is a bit mysterious—he is anxious not so much for battle but to kill, and he's mostly indifferent or insensitive to her needs. In fact, when she finally confesses her past to him, that he may know exactly who he's asked to marry him, he betrays her, confronting her superior at the tourist hotel, essentially derailing Jia's relatively comfortable existence. It is because of her fear of him, and the shame that she feels she's saddled him with, that she embarks on her journey to China.

The trip across the border provides Kim with an opportunity to describe the underbelly of North Korea. There are moments when the adventure could be anyplace where desperation fuels a dream of a better life elsewhere—the U.S.-Mexican border, the Straits of Florida or Gibraltar, the line down the middle of Hispaniola or any crossing into the more prosperous emirates—but Kim makes it particular with hauntingly simple language: “We rose and walked behind the station. I saw a line of eight or nine people sitting down with their backs against the wall. Some leaned their heads on the person next to them, their eyes closed tight, while others gazed blankly in front of them, never blinking. Their skin was black, but it was different from the foreigners with black skin I'd seen at the hotel. Black spots covered their faces.”

It takes Jia a moment to grasp what she's seeing, as it does us, and it's precisely that pause which serves as the punch to our gut. ■

BOOKS

Chain Stores, Picket Fences and Tanks

By Adam Doster

MUCH INK HAS been spilled over the ills of American suburbanization—homogeneity, car-dependency, systematic segregation and abolishment of public space. More and more people are questioning the value of communities once seen as the centerpiece of the American Dream. But anti-sprawl critiques are usually limited to places like Levittown or Laguna Beach. Could they be applied to U.S. military bases as well?

If Mark L. Gillem has anything to say about it, then yes. In *America Town: Building the Outposts of Empire* (University of Minnesota Press), Gillem details the suburbanization of America's military bases, the facilities political scientist Chalmers Johnson has trenchantly called "America's version of the colony." Some may find military land-use practices banal, but not Gillem—a former planner for the U.S. Air Force and an assistant professor of architecture at the University of Oregon. By exporting American sociospatial and consumption habits, he says, the U.S. Armed Forces seize valued land and further exacerbate tenuous relations with host nations, a dangerous and often overlooked consequence of America's imperial reach.

What kind of digs do the 600,000 deployed American service members inhabit? U.S. military bases, Gillem writes, "combine the sprawling and segregated patterns of suburbs, the social control so prevalent in nineteenth-century company towns, and the fear-driven enclosure of twentieth-century gated communities." Through an overview of planning data and case studies of three diverse military bases, he shows that contemporary American outposts are auto-focused, extensively lawned, filled with chain retailers and restaurants, and haphazardly ordered. Features like conformity, consumption and golf dominate the lives of troops overseas, just as they do for their stateside suburban counterparts.

For decades real estate developers have transformed the outlying urban landscape without regard for ecology,

geology and climate. The military takes it one step further, plotting land without regard for local populations. "The land under each base was not an island of empire, floating in a sea of white space," writes Gillem. "Rather, the land belonged to a nation, a people, a family, and oftentimes to an individual farmer struggling to survive." To compensate for overhauling the natural landscape, designers often try to tailor the new architecture with local flair. But collapsing a country's architectural customs onto American land patterns and structures does not make the design compatible with its surroundings—it usually mocks a country's visual culture.

And it's not enough for the military to usurp excessive amounts of foreign land and fashion it to their liking. Because the host nation "benefits from mutual defense," the United States forces its allies to cover much of the costs, establishing "burden sharing targets" of at least 50 percent. Considering that the Department of Defense controlled 711,418 acres and nearly 300 million square feet of buildings with a replacement value of \$117.6 billion in fiscal year 2006, that's

quite an obligation.

If military suburbanization is so problematic, why are outposts built this way? Fear, specifically the desire for dispersed construction in the face of growing terrorism, is one justification. Gillem points to the 1996 bombing of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia as a defining moment in this line of thinking. After the incident, which killed 19 U.S. airmen, the military moved its 6,000 soldiers from Khobar to a vacant airfield in the Saudi Arabian desert, in six weeks converting an unused base into "a major military compound the size of metropolitan Chicago." 9/11 stoked those fears, and the military not only moved troops from vulnerable urban centers into massive, fortified compounds but took extensive measures to diffuse construction density on each individual outpost.

The hierarchical military, Gillem writes, also operates under "an all-consuming corporate complex that insists on conformity." Instead of planning construction around each individual site, policymakers at the Pentagon develop strict guidelines, forcing base planners to follow a rigid set of rules, no matter

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



the local geography. The “General Plan,” influenced both by the policymakers’ familiarity with suburban layouts and anxiety about more attacks, results in bases best described as fortified suburban wastelands.

Gillem, who believes that “the use of space is an attribute of imperial power,” details how the military’s inefficient land-use policies not only harm the environment but also intensify the social and political cost of U.S. imperial aspirations. For one, accumulating livable land is a zero-sum game in many regions U.S. forces patrol. Accustomed to a country full of open spaces, Americans fail to comprehend how eating up valuable terrain without consent angers residents of the host nation. The immoderation that suburban living induces, such as unnecessary consumption patterns, excess noise and crime spillover, further strains national relations.

The construction of gated, sprawling compounds contributes to what Gillem sees as a changing—and counterproductive—dynamic in America’s foreign strategy. American imperialism of previous decades, while vicious in its economic and constitutional dictums, was in some cases willing to interact with local people and settings, whether for housing, food or companionship. But what was once an “empire of assimilation” has transformed into what Gillem describes as an “empire of avoidance,” marked by isolated and self-contained bases segregated from the communities in which they are situated. Building “mini-Americas” hinders cultural understanding between U.S. troops and the local residents they are supposedly deployed to protect.

While Gillem’s interpretation of imperial policies is at times crude and overgeneralized, *America Town* illuminates an overlooked effect of U.S. arrogance. Through his perspective as a former service-member and an architect, his accessible writing, and pictorial evidence of spatial disparities, Gillem offers a disturbing depiction of how policies devised in Washington harm the lives of innocent people the world over.

America Town provides few prescriptions for how to improve base planning policies. But the absence of such suggestions is the book’s takeaway message: Hegemons aren’t concerned with the de-

excerpt



THE KIDS CAN TAKE IT

While Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling is under attack for dispensing pagan poison, Australian children’s author Kerrie O’Connor is fending off criticism for giving kids a dose of something overly political. In the July issue of the U.K.’s Red Pepper magazine, O’Connor, author of Through the Tiger’s Eye (Allen & Unwin), defends her plots, the importance of politics and the aptitude of children everywhere.

I am occasionally accused of loading children up with far too heavy a theme, of being inappropriately political.

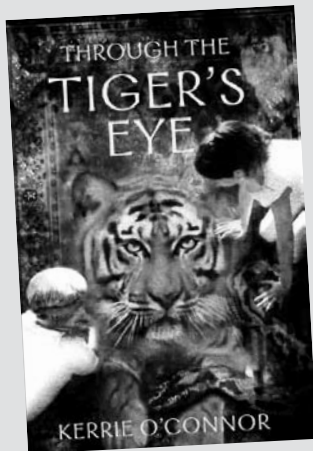
Yet where does life end and politics begin? I did not try to write a treatise on child labour or war, but, yes, my books contain some confronting episodes. They are also exciting, thrilling, funny, moving and engaging—or that’s what the reviews say.

My first rule is that the Story—with a capital S—comes first. In order to stay loyal to the young reader I was, and not bore my own children, I knew I had to deliver a compelling and grand tale, in which the characters were transformed in some way. My second rule is more thrills than chills. I can chill, but I have to reward with a double dose of thrills.

My third rule is avowedly old-fashioned: I insist on a happy ending. My child characters have to win and justice must prevail. I am not in the business of despair, of paralysing children with the idea that the world is an overwhelmingly awful place and, when the going gets tough, there

is no point trying. I want to take them on a meaningful adventure—and the big smiles on the faces of the primary school readers who come up to get their well-thumbed books signed is reward enough.

I’m not the first writer to give children an emotional mountain to climb, but perhaps I am more vulnerable to criticism of being “too political” because my books have a modern context. But strip the war and oppression from Tolkien and what are you left with? Expansionist Mordor reformed overnight and eager to live in peace with all things elvish? Take the politics out of the tale and you take the life out too.



sires of the subjugated.

Gillem’s analysis of imperial planning dating back centuries shows that an occupying country always defines how land is organized. “Other empires heavily regulated the planning and design of their outposts,” he writes. “They displaced local populations and demolished their building stock. They sought order over the seemingly disordered indigenous environments. They gained the consent of some segment of local leadership. And they officially sanctioned prostitution.”

Whether it’s exporting extravagant

suburbs, condoning torture or unilaterally attacking nations without provocation, Americans—like their predecessors—act to further their own aspirations, disregarding the rights and concerns of those with whom they share the world. *America Town* reminds us that considerate empires have never existed and imperial powers by their nature are beyond reform.

But history suggests that, one way or another, all empires eventually collapse. Instead of trying to rein in its excesses, people need to work toward hastening that happy, inevitable outcome. ■

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

Burned By Flame Retardants



THE OLD JOKE was: Americans eat so many preservatives, our corpses will never rot. Now, it turns out they won't burn either. Americans' bodies have the world's highest concentration of the flame retar-

dant polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDE)—10 to 40 times higher than Europeans—and our chemical burden is doubling every 3 to 5 years.

PBDEs, which resemble PCBs, are added to upholstery, computer parts, mattresses, fax machines, carpets, car seats and house wiring. We eat, absorb and breathe PBDEs daily, and they end up in everything from baby's brains and mother's milk to polar bears.

"What is in commercial products is getting into the environment," says EPA scientist Linda Birnbaum, "and what's in the environment is getting into wildlife and people."

Because the EPA does not require labeling, you are unlikely to know which, if any, PDBEs are in the mattress your baby sleeps on, the couch you potato on and the electronic equipment you surf the web with.

Nor the risks. Despite the chemical's ubiquity and 30-year history, the EPA says, "Our toxicology database [on PBDEs] is inadequate to truly understand the risk."

That stance serves the \$2.9 billion flame retardant industry—an industry that shreds logic by arguing simultaneously that the effects on humans are unknown and that exposures are too low to cause concern.

But evidence of the danger is piling up. While test animals exposed to high levels of PBDEs developed tumors, even low levels caused deficits in learning and memory that worsened with age. The chemical may also impact

behavior, disrupt endocrine function, irreparably damage reproductive systems and cause thyroid disease. A small decrease in thyroid hormone levels can produce cognitive impairment in children, including lowered IQ.

The three main types—penta-, octa- and deca-BDEs—are named for the number of bromine atoms. Penta and octa are now widely recognized as dangerous. After the European Union, Canada and a few U.S. states banned them, U.S. manufacturers saw the handwriting on the wall, and perhaps the lawsuits in the wings, and ceased production as of 2005.

Recycled materials, like carpet and drapery backing, as well as items produced before the phase-out, may contain as much as 30 percent penta or octa. According to *Pesticide & Toxic Chemical News*, since the 2004 E.U. ban, foreign sources are dumping "significant amounts" of octa- and penta-laden products in the United States.

The United States still manufactures deca-BDE and uses it in electronics, upholstery and textiles, despite its status as a likely carcinogen and its ability to break down into dioxin-like molecules.

"Some [Americans] have concentrations [of deca] not dissimilar to amounts in animals that cause cancer of the thyroid and liver," says Birnbaum.

PBDEs, like 62,000 other chemicals grandfathered in by the 1976 Toxic Substances Control Act, never underwent an approval process. In 2006, the Government Accountability Office found that the EPA "does not routinely assess the human health and environmental risks of existing chemicals and faces challenges in obtaining the information necessary to do so. ... Even when EPA has toxicity and exposure information," it has had difficulty demonstrating risks or pursuing limits or bans on production and use. In 31 years, the EPA has

required testing for fewer than 200 grandfathered chemicals.

It used to be assumed that most PBDE contamination came through eating dairy, meat and fish. Increasingly, researchers are looking at indoor air where concentrations are 15 to 50 times higher than outside. In addition to sources such as dust from polyurethane foam and fabric, PBDEs can emit gas at 84 degrees—a temperature common inside computers, cars and houses. The gas then clings to dust particles we breathe.

The link between inhaled PBDE and thyroid disease was strengthened by a recent study on cats. *Environmental Science & Technology* traced an epidemic of deadly feline hyperthyroid disease back to the '80s when PBDEs first proliferated. Tests on household cats found that PBDE flame retardant had "a clear association" with thyroid problems, said Birnbaum, a co-author of the study. Cats are particularly vulnerable because they live close to treated carpets and furniture, and breathe PBDE, as well as ingest it through grooming and food.

Another household member with similar exposures—minus the self-grooming, but with an added propensity to put everything into mouths—is children. A National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences study found that PBDE levels in infants and children were 2- to 3-fold higher than in adults.

The EPA, while calling for more research, relies on industry testing and resists calls to ban or label PBDEs, arguing that until there are safer alternatives, their usefulness in retarding burning outweighs the risk.

Europe, which uses alternative flame retardants, begs to disagree; Americans must beg the EPA to honor its middle name. ■

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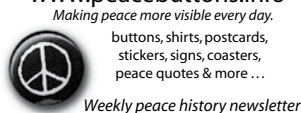
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Holy Toyland

Continued from back page

this fall, around 500 of Wal-Mart's stores will begin to carry "Daniel and the Lion's Den," "David and Goliath," "Jonah and the Big Fish," "Noah's Ark," and "Jesus Walks on Water" (complete with a shocked-looking fisherman and boat). Kids can recreate the Bible episodes using the figurine sets, and read a pamphlet with the scriptural references for the stories.

"I think the market is ready," Socha explains. "It's the boomerang effect. There is such a plethora of 'evil' or non-moral toys, and the market is void of faith-based toys that teach about Christianity."

Socha's onezbelieve, which once catered to small religious retailers, is positioning itself to move beyond the Christian demographic, offering an alternative to the secular toy market—a market that, it must be admitted, primarily sells violence to young boys (G. I. Joe, Marvel Superheroes, swash-buckler pirates, etc.), and trappy dress-up to young girls (Barbie, Bratz, etc.). Like the popular American Girl phenomenon, onezbelieve hopes to engage kids with toned-down educational toys.

If you're pining for more righteous God-fearing piety in your child's life, then these toys deliver the goods. For the rest of us, the evangelical tone of the dolls is somewhat disconcerting. Socha told me that one of the central goals of the toys is to "spread the gospel."

Of course, like a Dreamworks version of Moses (*Prince of Egypt*) or a Disney version of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, one can still read these toys as significant cultural, historical characters and narratives. Any of the Old Testament toys, for example, can appeal to Jewish and Muslim tots as well as Christians, and even atheists and agnostics probably want their kids to know who Samson, Noah and, of course, Jesus were.

"These look a lot better than most," says Adam Demuro, father of two and manager of Holy Name Cathedral Bookstore in Chicago. "I go to a lot of Christian merchandise tradeshow, and these [Tales of Glory toys] look nicer than the lame alternatives. Most of the stuff I see in religious stores looks like bad recycles of '70s dolls."

"This is just one more example," says Demuro, "of how Protestants have married together their faith and modern

marketing. I don't know if I agree with that, but they certainly are successful. I'll bet they make a lot of money on this stuff when it hits Wal-Mart."

They may look more attractive than previous attempts, but that doesn't mean they'll make good toys. Raphael Salazar, a 36-year-old construction worker and father of one from Chicago, says that he'd like his kid to play with the dolls, but

onezbelieve, Levine's corporation, Family Values, LLC, is offering heroes like Moses, David, Noah and female heroes like "Deborah the Warrior" and "Queen Esther." But while these figures seem designed more for "action," they look positively ridiculous. All the male characters are just repainted versions of the same guy, and the paintjobs are inexplicably weird (e.g., Noah looks like a Green Bay

The missed opportunities are regretful. Goliath is barely taller than David. Jonah is inexplicably bigger than the whale that he's supposed to fit inside. And where the hell is Satan?

"kids make up their own minds."

"It doesn't matter what the parents like or push," says Salazar. "I like the fact that these toys don't have guns, but only my kid can decide whether it's fun to play with."

The problem is that, as "action-figures," all these dolls are disappointing—they have an extremely small range of motion, come with accessories that few kids would find interesting (e.g., Moses comes with a "bush covered with locusts") and even the "bad guys" (e.g., Goliath and Pharaoh) are painfully cute. The Tales of Glory toys look designed more for middle-aged curio collectors, who might put them in their vitrines, next to Franklin Mint Lady Di dolls and Precious Moments tchotchkes.

Moreover, the missed opportunities are regretful: Goliath is only a smidgen taller than a boyish David; Jonah is inexplicably *bigger* than the whale he's supposed to fit inside; and no seven-headed dragons (Revelations) or Leviathans (Book of Job, Psalms) or Behemoths (Book of Job) will appear in the Tales of Glory series. If the toymakers want to capture the fantasy market, currently dominated by the unapologetically pagan Harry Potter dynasty, they will have to draw on the Bible's darker elements. Where the hell is Satan?

Perhaps the "father of G.I. Joe" Don Levine will come to the rescue with a more flexible set of Biblical action-figures. In 1964, Levine released the famous G. I. Joe doll for Hasbro, and now he's bringing out the Almighty Heroes line of action figures, based on the various champions of the Old Testament. Like

Packers linebacker, and David looks like a spaceman/aerobics-instructor hybrid). Never mind. The goal of Levine's series is to offer "inspirational resources for today's modern family." But unlike the Tales of Glory, these inspirations are not available at Wal-Mart. The Almighty Heroes are still relegated to the strictly religious retail avenues—Bible-Belt stores and websites like DeeperShopping.com.

All these Biblical dolls, as such, are just a trifle really, but they also typify a more worrying cultural trend. Contemporary religious media has unprecedented power these days to create a kind of "religious matrix" that completely surrounds the believer. True believers, for example, can elect to home-school their kids with Christian textbooks, can listen to religious radio for Christian music and talk-shows, do their financial planning with Christian investment firms, get all their news from Christian TV and websites, dig up their "science" from creationist museums and books, play with religious action figures, and generally avoid the wider public culture altogether. It's not the Christianity that's troubling here, but rather the self-imposed cultural segregation.

Of course, it could be argued that, relative to other forms of zealotry (which include sanctioned violence), this American brand of blinkered religion is harmless. Perhaps the new American religious crusader, who sees himself as a "David" facing a secular "Goliath," will simply distinguish his piety by buying righteous stuff. The mega-store might well be the new American battlefield between the sacred and profane. ■

HOLY TOYLAND



JULIEN, MY FOUR-YEAR-OLD SON, had two plastic action-figures locked in mortal combat.

“Who will win,” he asked, looking up at me, “Spider-Man or Moses?” We discussed their relative strengths, and he settled on the superiority of Spider-Man. The Moses toy had only a big staff in one hand and a couple stone tablets in the other—not very impressive next to Spidey’s web-slinging power. Also, my son reasoned, Moses, with his long white beard and bathrobe, looked “too old” for serious battle.

This kind of bizarre conversation may soon be repeated all over the country when the Tales of Glory action-figures start selling at Wal-Mart stores this fall. A company called “one2believe” is marketing the faith-based dolls “to find a way to help children learn vital Bible lessons via Scripture and to ultimately come to faith in Jesus,” says founder David Socha. one2believe is the Biblical Doll Division of the Beverly Hills Teddy Bear Company of Valencia, Calif.

I asked Socha which dolls are hot sellers. “Our talking Jesus doll, that teaches children scripture, seems to be the bestseller on all fronts,” he replies. The Beverly Hills Teddy Bear Company has been selling the 12-inch talking “Jesus, God’s Son” since 2005.

Jesus, who looks remarkably like the Brawny Paper Towel Man, has kung-fu grip and utters soothing but authoritarian Bible quotes, like, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3). This lumberjack-like Jesus made some headlines in 2006 when the Toys for Tots organization (a branch of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve) refused a donation of 4,000 of the dolls for its annual Christmas drive. The irony of turning down Jesus toys for Christmas seems too obvious for comment, but Toys for Tots worried that children on the receiving-end of these donations may not be Christian and therefore it could seem more like a missionary gesture than plain charity. A few days later, however, Toys for Tots reversed its decision and accepted the Jesus dolls, saying simply that they had “found appropriate places for these items.”

Now the makers of talking Jesus have a new line of PVC figures (made in China), and for the first time Wal-Mart, the biggest toy retailer in the United States, is on their side. Starting

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